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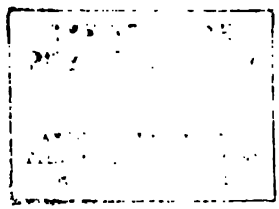

"With That Shining Tube Pointed at M——"
(Page 73)

MILLIONS OF MISCHIEF

THE STORY OF A GREAT SECRET

BY

Beadon Hill

AUTHOR OF

"BY A HAIR'S-BREADTH," "THE DUKE DECIDES,"
"A RACE WITH RUIN," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

"And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischief."—Julius Cæsar, Act IV., Scene 1.

AKRON, OHIO

THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING CO.

NEW YORK 1905 CHICAGO

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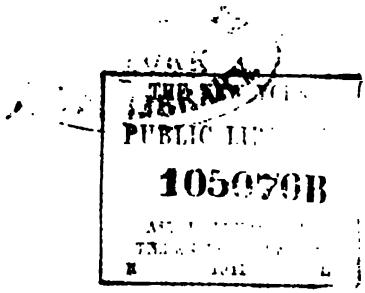

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JUN 1 1905

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PROLOGUE

THE meeting of the Cabinet came to an abrupt termination with the sudden rising of the Premier. Lord Alphington's colleagues watched him nervously as he strode to the door of the council chamber, and watched him with graver apprehension as he turned there and faced them, his usually impassive countenance ablaze with righteous wrath.

"That, my lords and gentlemen, is my policy," he exclaimed. "If you will not agree to it I must reconstruct or resign."

For twenty seconds the great statesman stood with his majestic figure framed in the black oak of the doorway, his eagle glance singling out the three dissentients. Then, shaking his mane like an angry lion, he turned and was gone.

After an interval of awe-struck silence the other ministers followed him out of the room—all but the three who had been the cause of this unrehearsed effect. These pulled their chairs closer and prepared for an informal discussion of their position. The tall man with the stooping shoulders and the yellow snags of teeth was Sir Gideon Marske, the Chancellor of the Exchequer; the ponderous, oily man was Mr. North-

moor, the Home Secretary; the brisk little man with the furtive eye was Viscount Trevose, Secretary of State for War. In their different ways they all looked frightened.

And well they might, for having failed to carry their point at this, the stormiest Cabinet council of the century, they were left face to face with the prospect of being stripped of the emoluments of office. Professional politicians each and all, they were none of them rich, and the Premier's threat to reconstruct or resign touched the pockets of these pretentious but impecunious men.

"Political assassination has long been in the limbo of the past, or it would be a case for a hired bravo and a dagger," said Sir Gideon Marske, with the nervous laugh of one who throws out a tentative jest.

The other two started and looked at him fixedly. It was true that Lord Alphington's death would cut the Gordian knot of their perplexities. The question at issue was the attitude to be preserved toward a Foreign Power which need not be specified. The Prime Minister's policy made for conciliation, with a view to reducing the people's burdens; his opponents were for yielding to popular clamor, which would probably plunge the country into war with its inevitable consequence of enormous expenditure.

Lord Trevose, with the memory of his mortgaged acres pressing him, echoed the Chancellor's laugh. "Of course it is an anachronism, but a knife in Alphington's ribs would assuredly save the country from humiliation; only a bold front can prevent a costly war," he said. Himself he could not deceive,

but, like his associates, he half hoped to dress up his mercenary aspirations in the garb of patriotism—for the deception of the other two.

Mr. Northmoor, the Home Secretary, did not laugh. He was one of those who had no need for laughter of that kind, inasmuch as in his speech was a bland, purring note that left his hearers in doubt as to his sincerity. You could take him seriously or not, as you chose, which was convenient to a many-sided man. But those who knew him well were aware of a certain peculiarity—a mere trick of manner. He always coughed unconsciously after making a statement which he himself meant in earnest.

"The thing could be done now—quite easily," he said, glancing quickly from one to the other of his colleagues. Sir Gideon and Lord Trevose watched him, open-eyed and open-eared. Yes, the remark was followed by the short, wheezy cough significant of *intention*.

For fully a minute the three statesmen sat and looked at each other in an awe-struck silence, which Sir Gideon was the first to break.

"You are always fond of your little joke, Northmoor," he faltered huskily. "How—supposing, of course, that we meant business—how could the thing be done?"

"You have heard of the Rivington murder case, for which one Arthur Rivington is now lying under sentence of death in Winchester Jail?" Mr. Northmoor asked quietly.

Yes, they had all heard of the case, as how should they not, when all England was ringing with the

infamy of the young man recently convicted of the cold-blooded, calculating murder, at intervals and by poison, of his mother and sister?

"Well, in that wretch, gentlemen, we have an instrument ready to hand," proceeded the Home Secretary impressively. And, feeling his ground by a glance at his colleagues' faces, he went on: "For no particular reason—with the maudlin sentimentality of the age, perhaps—the jury recommended Rivington to mercy, and the matter came before me officially to decide. As usual, I sent for the judge who tried the case, who happened to be Sir James Morrison—about the most lenient of the pack. He was dead against any deviation from the capital sentence, ridiculed the recommendation of the jury, and affirmed that the prisoner's guilt was beyond the possibility of doubt, and that the crime was the most cruel, the most cunning, the most carefully covered-up that it had ever been his lot to try. 'A fiend in human shape,' was the learned judge's last word about Arthur Rivington; and I maintain that as patriots, with our dear country hovering on the brink of a terrible war, we are justified in using any fiend in any sort of shape, for averting such a catastrophe."

His hearers were not deceived by his heroics, though they struggled hard to believe that in their own individual cases that whole-souled sentiment was really genuine.

"But if the fellow is going to be hanged how could he serve our—I mean the turn of the country?" hazarded Lord Trevose after a pause. Though willing to go far, the Secretary of War was not an imaginative

man. His obtuseness caused irritation to Sir Gideon Marske, whose shifts and expedients were a by-word.

"Don't you see? Northmoor, as head of the Home Department, has his grip on the prison service," said Sir Gideon. "Northmoor will pull the strings and the little figure will——"

"Escape," interjected the Home Secretary with a snap. "Marske has grasped the situation to a nicety. I can see to it that the cage is left unfastened and that the bird flutters out—only to be recaptured and turned to our purpose immediately. Herzog, of the Secret Service, is the man to take him in hand and tell him what he has to do as the price of his freedom."

"But what of Herzog himself?" Lord Trevose suggested uneasily. "I know something of the fellow—that he is an unmitigated scoundrel. We should be simply delivering ourselves bound into his hands if we asked him to act as go-between in such an affair."

Mr. Northmoor purred softly, like a large, sleek, well-fed cat. "Ask Sir Gideon," was all the answer he vouchsafed.

"Mr. Herzog's value as the most faithful and unscrupulous member of the Secret Service lies in the fact that at a word from me he would go into penal servitude for life," said the Chancellor. "He was in my Department originally, you know—as a Surveyor of Taxes. When he went wrong I spared him because I recognized that the Service would gain by the addition of a tool without conscience or compassion, who would not dare to decline any dirty work the State might require of him. And the State does require dirty work sometimes."

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he mutual confidence necessary to cons
ently Lord Trevose yawned, then rose brisl

Well, we've wasted a lot of time over thi
I shall go to the club for lunch."
r. Northmoor laid a fat hand on his ar
pered, "Sit down, Trevose. It isn't a fai
Sir Gideon?"
Not so far as I am concerned," replied Al-

ARTHUR RIVINGTON'S NARRATIVE

CHAPTER I

BRINK OF THE SCAFFOLD

"ONE, two, three, four," tolled the clocks of the ancient city, led by the cathedral chimes. Four o'clock on Monday afternoon, and at nine o'clock on Thursday morning I was to be led out to die. The medley of musical sounds wafted from afar through the iron-barred window meant that I had exactly sixty-five hours to live before I passed for the last time out into God's sunlight, there to be hanged by the neck till I was dead.

The harsh voice of the judge who had flung those fatal words at me across the crowded court three weeks before was still ringing in my ears. Then I had hardly realized their real import, welcoming them indeed as the conclusion of a horrible nightmare, and, above all, as terminating his lordship's ruthless invective on the enormity of my offense. But now, with the sands in the hour-glass of fate so nearly spent, the words of

doom buzzed in my ears with a meaning full of menace.

Glancing round the sombre limits of the condemned cell, at the bare, drab-colored walls, the bare table with its drab-bound Bible, the drab counterpane of the hard bed on which I had spent what seemed a lifetime of sleepless nights, I felt that I could welcome the realization of the grim words of my sentence, but for one fact—that I was innocent of the almost nameless horror of which I had been convicted.

And given a month of freedom I was confident that I could lift the load of ignominy that had overwhelmed me, by shifting it to the right shoulders. At any rate, I should have the chance of proving my innocence at the expense of the unknown fiend who had robbed me of mother, of sister, and of good name.

And once again I laughed in derision at the idea that I, Arthur Rivington, should have been deemed capable of having schemed with diabolical and cruel cunning to poison, for the sake of a few paltry hundreds, the two women whom, next to one other only, I held most dear.

The sound of my laughter was quickly followed by the grating of the key in the lock of my cell. The door swung open, and the warder who had charge of me entered, regarding me with a keen glance of what looked very like anxiety. Hitherto this man's demeanor had been one of callous contempt, his scanty speech and rough manners showing that he shared the public loathing in which I was held. But this afternoon some new emotion seemed to have awakened in him. It was hardly pity, and certainly not friendli-

ness; yet I could see that he was eyeing me with an intentness that bespoke a personal interest.

"What's up?" he said curiously. "Did I hear you laugh?"

Such was my mood that I made him no answer, but went on laughing. The warder stepped to the door, peeped up and down the corridor, and came in again, shutting the door behind him and placing his back against it.

"Look here, I can't have you going off your head just when you've become valuable," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'd meant to keep it to the last minute, lest the chaplain or the governor should pay you a visit and notice anything, but I must chance that—sooner than have you go barmy. I can tell you something to make you laugh the right side of your face."

"They have found that I am innocent? I am pardoned, or at least reprieved?" I cried.

"If you raise your voice like that I'll knock you down," said the brute, advancing a step. "Pardoned! Reprieved!" he added, with a contemptuous belief in my guilt that was obviously genuine. "They don't hand around pardons and reprieves to your sort. It's me that's the pardoner and repriever, and I'll tell you the way of it, if you'll promise to keep quiet, and not get shrieking like a silly woman in the high-strikes."

Feverishly I gave the required promise, and strove to calm myself while the hulking, beetle-browed fellow poured his whisky-laden tale in my ear. He had been heavily bribed by a "well-wisher" of mine, as he called it, to arrange my escape from Winchester prison, and to put me on the way to safety afterwards.

He had got the details all cut and dried; nothing seemed easier. He would bring me a warder's uniform, and I would leave the prison with him at nine o'clock when he went off duty and the night shift came on. He would take me to his house in the town, supply me with private clothes, and do all that was necessary to give me a clean pair of heels.

"But the thing is impossible!" I faltered, when I had recovered a little from the shock. "You have to hand me over to the night warder."

"He's in it, too," was the laconic rejoinder.

"You will both be discharged."

"It has been made worth our while," said the warder, with a sardonic grin that left no doubt as to the truth of his statement, though it increased my dazed perplexity. The only person on earth who believed in my innocence, so far as I knew, and who cared enough to snatch me from the gallows, was my own true love, Janet Chilmark, and she, poor girl, could never have satisfied these venal sharks out of her limited means. Yet I could think of no one else who had done this thing, and I could only conclude that Janet had made some superhuman effort to raise the needful money.

To my importunate questions as to who had bribed him the warder remained dumb. All he would say was that "my friend" would be waiting for me, ready to render me further assistance, at the "Pilot's Rest," a third-rate hotel at Southampton, whither I was to go that very night. Bidding me control my impatience, he withdrew to his usual post outside the cell door.

The next few hours were, I think, the most nerve-straining that I had passed since my arrest. Always there was present to me the horrible thought that the warder's statement was all a horrible jest at the expense of a wretched prisoner to whom he had taken a dislike from the first. It seemed too good to be true, that certain doom was to be changed by some unknown magician into at least a chance for life, and what meant more than life—a chance to reestablish my innocence. With each succeeding chorus from the city clocks this feeling of doubt grew, till it became an agony, and I could have cried aloud in my distress.

But with the stroke of nine came relief with the reappearance of the warder, accompanied by the colleague who was to take his place. One was wearing two tunics, the other two pairs of trousers, of which they promptly divested themselves of the outer ones.

"Look sharp and slip into them," said the day man, producing a "cheese-cutter" cap from the chest of his own tunic, while his colleague disburdened himself of a cleverly-concealed pair of boots.

With so much before me to tell of the next few crowded weeks I will pass over the details of my escape, and I can do so the more readily as they were quite without incident. Clad in the official costume, I simply walked out of prison side by side with my surly rescuer, and went with him to a little house not far from the gates, where I changed into a suit of tweeds that had been provided. Then he handed me a sovereign for my railway fare, and bade me catch the nine-thirty train for Southampton.

"No need to skulk," said the warder as he opened

his house-door to let me out. "There won't be any hue and cry until morning, when my mate will give the alarm that you've flown, and you'll have met with your friend by that time. Don't forget the address—the 'Pilot's Rest,' Backwater Street, Southampton. Give the name of Tennant, and ask for Mr. Herzog."

To obey the injunction not to skulk was more difficult than it sounded. As I made my way to the station I had the instinctive feeling that every eye in the crowded, lamp-lit streets was on me, and knew me as the notorious murderer. It was, of course, ridiculous, for none of the hurrying wayfarers had met me in the flesh, and it was highly improbable that any one would recognize me from the abominable woodcuts, "sketched in court," that had appeared in the Sunday papers. Yet I could not shake off the sensation, any more than I could help turning occasionally to see if my steps were dogged. It was not till I stepped into an empty compartment of the nine-thirty that I breathed freely.

To secure privacy I had taken a first-class ticket for the short run, and it was, therefore, disappointing to have the door dragged open just as the train was starting, by a well-dressed gentleman who sank exhausted on the opposite seat. I was relieved, however, by the fact that he showed no sort of interest in me, but at once became engrossed in the pages of *Punch*.

To soothe my nerves and distract my attention I fell to studying his face, and I found therein food for reflection in many sharp contrasts. For instance, the nose was large and fleshy, and the cheeks were of a florid bagginess that it is usual to associate with jovial

good-fellowship, yet the thin, straight lips spoke of asceticism, or possibly cruelty. Again, the eyes, which twinkled with appreciative humor at some joke in the paper, grew as cold as steel when he seemed to lapse into an introspective mood, gazing out into the night.

The journey to Southampton was soon accomplished, and my fellow-passenger, descending before me, disappeared amongst the crowd on the platform. With the haunting dread of being followed and recaptured strong on me, I dared not, at the station, take a cab to the hotel, or even inquire the way to it, but, striking out into a succession of quiet streets, I put a considerable distance between myself and the railway before I ventured to ask a passer-by for Backwater Street. Luckily he was able to direct me, and traversing the length of the mean thoroughfare I found that the "Pilot's Rest" was the corner house at the far end.

The hotel seemed to be of the class frequented by inferior officers of the mercantile marine. The dingy hall was ill-lighted, and on one side of it was a counter which did double duty as a bar and the office. Presiding thereat was an elderly barmaid, engaged for the moment in listening to a friendly argument between two coasting skippers.

"Mr. Herzog!" she repeated, in answer to my question. "Yes, he's here—arrived about half-an-hour ago. If you're Mr. Tennant, go right upstairs, please, and knock at the second door on the left. He's expecting you."

"Is—is there a lady with him?" I hazarded, with a wild hope at my heart that Janet might have come to meet me, and yet full of fear at the risk she would

run in assisting the escape of a condemned convict.

But no. With a shake of her head the woman denied me that blessed prospect, and, obeying her instructions, I mounted to the first floor. A tap at the door she had indicated elicited a sharp command to enter, and an instant later I was in the presence of—my recent fellow-passenger.

He rose from a table, on which were a decanter of whisky and a box of cigars, and surveyed me with a long, cold scrutiny that was hardly that of a friend who had broken, and was breaking, the law on my behalf. I had a better view of him here in the gas-lit room than in the railway carriage. His large, fleshy face was thrust slightly forward; his expressionless eyes seemed to be appraising me as a marketable commodity; his hands were pushed deep into his trousers pockets, holding back his silk-lapeled frock-coat and disclosing a well-filled waistcoat. Then, suddenly, as in the next momentous days I discovered was a habit with the man, his mood seemed to change and his eyes brimmed with fun.

"So!" he exclaimed, waving me to a chair by the fireplace and resuming his seat. "You were frightened of me in the train, my friend, but not so much as I of you."

"*You* were frightened of *me?*" I said in honest wonder. "Surely there was nothing terrifying in my demeanor towards you."

He looked at me curiously, "Not in your demeanor, Captain Rivington, but in your reputation," he replied. "It is not a pleasant experience to take a railway journey in the company of a murderer who is as

yet ignorant that he is beholden to one for arranging his escape."

I started at his words. Was it possible that this man, who had been the prime mover in enabling me to break prison, had done so in the full belief that I was guilty of the horrible crime for which I had been condemned? Yes, I could tell by the frosty glitter of those cunning eyes, by the pitiless curl of the thin lips, that whatever he had done for me had not been done through friendship. The solace of thinking that I had been helped to freedom because of my innocence had been short-lived indeed.

CHAPTER II

A TERRIBLE TASK

"WHO are you, then, and why have you risked imprisonment in aiding such a desperate wretch?" I asked bitterly. A swift intuition told me that to protest my innocence would be useless, and the brutal directness of Herzog's method soon convinced me that I was right in my surmise.

"Sit down and help yourself to whisky and a cigar," he said, pushing his chair back and crossing his legs. "So! that is better. It will be wiser to disillusion you at once, my friend, from any false hopes as to rehabilitation. You have been removed from Winchester Jail because you *are* a desperate wretch, and because, by doing one more desperate deed, there is the barest chance that you may save your forfeited life."

"But what if I refuse?" I asked him.

He went on in the same even tones, as though unheeding the interruption. "You are to remember that for the present you are just as much a prisoner as if you were back in the condemned cell, to which at

a hint of revolt you would return. You are mine, body and soul, to do the task I shall set you, or go back and be hanged on Thursday morning."

"Then by all means allow me the privilege of hearing what it is you wish me to do," I replied, with a forced laugh. Even thus early in our intercourse I was beginning, from an instinct of self-preservation, to shape the course I had to steer. But I should have to keep a light hand on the tiller, with a keen eye for rocks and shoals; for this was no mean opponent, and he held me surely, so far, in a grip which he would never willingly relax.

"You have killed two women, both nearly related to you—killed them for paltry gain," he said, protruding his fleshy face toward me.

I winced inwardly from the loathsome charge, but braced myself to answer callously, "What of that? It is of the future that we speak."

"Good!" he chuckled. "I had begun to have my doubts of you, but that sounds better. Well, what I want of you is to kill a *man* this time, and I am empowered to give you this assurance, without naming my authority, that every facility will be given you, not only for striking the necessary blow, but for getting clear away afterward. You can understand that it would not be convenient to my principals to have you caught."

"The thing has to be done at once?" I asked.

"Within a fortnight. Apart from more vital considerations it might be difficult to keep you from recapture for longer than that," was the reply.

"Permit me five minutes for consideration while I

finish this excellent cigar," I said, playing up to the *rôle* which I had adopted of calculating scoundrel.

"As we sleep here to-night, I will give you as long as you like, but to spare you needless trouble, let me warn you not to waste time on scheming to break away from me," said Herzog, fixing me with one of his gimlet stares. "As I said before, you are as much a prisoner, here in the 'Pilot's Rest,' as you were at Winchester. This affair has not been entered upon lightly. I have three skilled assistants in and around the hotel."

I could quite understand that he spoke truth in that, for the suborning of the warders at the prison suggested careful organization, in the preliminaries of which the principal would not have appeared. Nor was I meditating any such attempt as he hinted at, for the simple reason that without friends and without money my recapture would have been only a matter of hours. No, my policy seemed to be to appear to accede to his demands in the hope that during the fortnight's grace I might discover the missing link in the evidence necessary to secure my pardon. That he would be a difficult man to deceive as to my ultimate intentions I foresaw, but I had this in my favor, that he believed me guilty, and would not, if I played my cards well, suspect me of employing my comparative liberty to upset the verdict of the jury. But the question which pressed me most closely was whether a fortnight, during which I should doubtless be under close surveillance, would be sufficient for my purpose. Since my arrest I had always longed for a month of absolute freedom to pursue independent inquiries, and

now not only would the time be curtailed by one half, but I should be virtually in Herzog's custody. The question called for a review of the situation, to ascertain if I could extract a ray of hope therefrom.

In all truth it was but the merest glimmer. As I have stated, the alleged crime for which I had been condemned was the murder by poison of my mother and my sister, Clara. The widow and daughter of a country clergyman, they had lived in a modest way in a cottage near Brockenhurst in the New Forest, to which I had been a visitor as often as my military duties as captain in the artillery would allow. One of the principal points made against me at the trial was that their deaths had occurred, at intervals of six months, during these visits, and that I was the only one who would benefit pecuniarily.

With the nurse and the doctor I had been present at the death-beds of both my dear ones—my mother's first, and a little later my sister's—and it was on three disjointed words that Clara had whispered in my ear that I had built my slender hopes. Raising herself with her last effort, she had mustered strength to breathe the unmeaning words: "*Man, mask, Roger.*" On being accused, I had mentioned this strange saying to my solicitor, who had been able to make nothing of it except that she may have alluded to a *masked man* whose name was *Roger*. In this I had agreed with him, but I had always thought that he had made no real effort to trace out the mysterious "Roger." In fact, my solicitor, like all the world save one, was, I knew, after my first interview with him, convinced of my guilt.

Could I, in a fortnight, and with the basilisk eye of my unfathomable liberator on me, run this unknown Roger to ground? Well, as the alternative was to go back to Winchester and be hanged on Thursday, I would at least make the attempt.

Draining my glass, I flung the stump of my cigar into the empty grate and met Herzog's mocking gaze. I struggled not to quail under it for I had to live up to my reputation if I was to live at all. "A desperate wretch," he had called me, and a desperate wretch he must continue to think me while I searched for a rift in the clouds.

"Well, my noble captain; I can see that you have decided to cheat the gallows by the paradoxical method of deserving them twice over. Is it not so?" he said.

"I appear to have no option in the matter," I replied, affecting the sullen resignation that under the circumstances would have been natural to the villain he deemed me.

"Pshaw! I knew all along that you, being what you are, would take the sensible view, and there is this consolation—that if you are caught after crime number two you can only be hanged once," he chuckled. "And now, my friend, that is the last word I shall say to harrow you," he went on in a pleasanter tone. "A little harshness was necessary to show you the futility of trying to gammon me with pleas of innocence, but having accepted the situation you shall be treated with all courtesy during our association—so long as you are true to the compact. Only so long as that, mind. But it will be your own fault if you do not find me a cheerful and resourceful comrade,

with bowels of compassion enough to take a sporting interest in your ultimate escape."

Every word this man spoke filled me with loathing and disgust. I was not sure that I did not dislike his oily overtures for amity more than his hostile sneers. "Let us come to business," I said. "Who is it that I am to kill? He should be a person of some importance to warrant such elaborate preparations."

Herzog took a sip from his glass and eyed me as though to discover if I was ripe for the disclosure. "Yes, he would be considered important," was my custodian's reply; "though from your point of view that should make no difference. High-born and highly-placed flesh is as susceptible to knife or bullet as that of a street-hawker. The individual to whom you have to turn your attention is the Right Honorable George Augustus, Earl of Alphington."

"My Heaven!" I cried aghast. "The Prime Minister?"

"No less," said Herzog, watching me warily—so warily that it was time to play-act a little, and I did it with such clumsy craft as I possess.

"The head of the cursed Government that spurned the jury's recommendation to mercy," I hissed. "Herzog, I know nothing of your motives, nor do I care a jot for them. But give me the means to slay this infernal tyrant, and I will blot him out as if he were a mad dog. Lead me to him as soon as you like and you will not find me fail. Where is my Lord Alphington?"

For a moment I feared that I had overdone it, so fiercely penetrating grew Herzog's stare. But no;

he drew a long breath of relief and poured himself out a fresh drink.

"To-night Lord Alphington is in London," he said, when he had refreshed himself. "But in a day or two he goes to a mansion near Freshwater in the Isle of Wight, which he has taken for the recess—at Totland Bay, to be precise. We also shall become denizens of the Isle of Wight to-morrow, my friend—in the character of harmless summer visitors."

Once more, at the very outset of my intercourse with this remarkable man, I needed all the restraint I could muster. My true Janet, the girl of my heart, and the only being in the wide world who believed in me, was staying at Totland Bay.

But I succeeded in conjuring up a malignant laugh as I repeated the phrase, "Harmless summer visitors!"

CHAPTER III

I PICK UP A LADY

THAT night as I lay awake in the bedroom which I shared with Herzog at the Southampton Hotel I was elated and depressed by turns at the prospect of having Janet near me during the coming ordeal. I dreaded dragging her into the horrible vortex in which I seethed, and yet it might be that she would be able to help me if I could only communicate with her unknown to Herzog. Without some one who was a free agent to aid me I did not see how I was even to attempt the solution of poor Clara's last mystic utterance, and Janet was the only one to whom I could safely appeal without fear of being betrayed.

On the whole, then, I accepted it as a good omen that I was going to the one place where I might find an opportunity of enlisting her help if I finally decided to do so.

Looking back at those momentous days, I am struck by the singular apathy of my mental attitude towards the stupendous event of which I was the pivot. I had lost all sense of proportion. By the side of my own sad case the projected murder of the Prime Minister,

under apparently powerful auspices, seemed a comparatively small matter. I was filled with a mild wonder, whether such an anachronism as political assassination was afoot, or whether Lord Alphington's death had been planned by some secret society of anarchists—that was all. I was inclined to the former view, from the ease with which my escape had been arranged. It pointed to wire-pullers in high-places, who had sufficient influence to open the prison doors. But seeing that I did not mean to kill his lordship, I really didn't care much.

From my minor standpoint, Herzog was the only person that mattered, and when, toward morning, I woke from a fitful sleep and found him bending over me with a thoughtful frown, he seemed to matter more than ever.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "I was only studying your features as an artist. In other words, I must disguise you before we set out upon our enterprise, and I see that your countenance is adaptable. Your mustache must come off, and then, with the addition of some false side whiskers, you will be unrecognizable. You will travel under the great protection of being in the company of the last man in the kingdom with whom you will be looked for."

After we had breakfasted, he effected such a change in my appearance that I should not have known myself, but his method was so simple that there was but little chance of detection. Shortly afterward we left the hotel, I at his bidding preceding him by five minutes and waiting for him at the corner of the street. "Mr. Tennant," the name by which I had passed at

the "Pilot's Rest," was to be discarded forever, he told me as he rejoined me. Henceforth I was to be "Mr. Martin," an invalid in charge of his private medical man, while he himself was in future to be known as Doctor Barrables. So were my tracks from Winchester to be obliterated.

After a visit to an outfitter's, where I was supplied with several suits of clothes and other necessaries, we made our way to the railway station and took tickets for Lymington. While waiting for the train I noticed that there was unwonted excitement round the book-stall. The clerk was selling papers as fast as he could hand them over, and non-purchasers were gleaning what information they could from the contents bills, on which was displayed in huge letters the legend, "Escape of the condemned murderer, Rivington."

I shuddered, but Herzog went and bought a paper. "It is all right," he said, after glancing at it. "The police are on a hot scent after you to London. I did not spend a couple of hours yesterday at Winchester for nothing."

"It is dreadful," I faltered.

"You will get used to it—you *must*," he whispered significantly.

After a little while, when I found that nobody paid the least attention to me, I gained more confidence, and by the time we went on board the steamer at Lymington I had lost most of my self-consciousness.

It was a glorious summer day, and as the boat threaded the narrow channel of the river towards the broad Solent, even I could not but feel the joy of life. Away ahead of us, in the shimmering haze, rose the

green hills of the Isle of Wight; to the right the sparkling tide danced gaily toward the Needles and the open sea; to the left, half-a-dozen white-winged yachts from Cowes raced for the Spit Buoy. The fresh salt air stung the face with its promise of health. Janet was somewhere there among those tree-girt villas now coming into view under the mighty down four miles away. All this, and yesterday at this hour I was in the condemned cell, in the eye of the law a felon, doomed to die forty-eight hours hence!

And if I made one little slip I should return there to suffer the dread penalty. The thought wiped away the delight of the contrast and brought me back to earth again. It being the height of the tourist season the little steamer was crowded, running as it did in connection with the first fast London train of the day. Herzog had, doubtless for reasons of his own, taken first-class tickets, with the result that we had been free to mount the bridge deck. He, who was at once my evil genius and my preserver, stood at my side, leaning over the rails and chattering trifles to me—for the benefit of bystanders.

Of these, the nearest was a tall, handsome girl, plainly but expensively dressed, who, save for a maid, seemed to be traveling alone. There was an air of detachment about her, and yet of interest in her impersonal surroundings, that somehow gave the impression of the "great lady." I could see that Herzog was keenly alive to her propinquity, and probably knew who she was. At any rate, he seemed to be talking at her, laboring the relations supposed to subsist between him and me.

"If you find the air too cold up here, Mr. Martin, let us go down to the lower deck," he said. "I can't have you catching cold, you know, just as you are going to begin your cure."

Determined to play my part for the present, I was making some appropriate reply, when a broad-shouldered, slim-waisted man came up the stairs and advanced toward the fair unknown. There was a swaggering *braggadocio* in his manner, a self-assertion about his waxed mustache, that filled me with vague dislike. He glanced contemptuously at me and was treating Herzog to the same sort of survey, when his eyes, blood-shot and red-rimmed they were, dilated for one fleeting instant, and were quickly averted.

"Sorry I could not come up before, but I have been occupied in looking after your luggage," he said as he joined the lady.

"It doesn't matter at all," was the reply that sounded like a snub. "Have you done with your newspaper yet? If so, I should like to look at it."

The gentleman affected to search in the pockets of his traveling cape, and then gave vent to an exclamation of annoyance. "I must have left it in the train," he said. "Are you always as eager for news as you are this morning, Lady Muriel?"

"No, but I am particularly interested in this escape that every one is talking of," was the answer that thrilled me with a wonder that increased tenfold when the speaker added in a grave, sweet tone, "Not on my own account, you know, but a friend of mine is a staunch believer in Captain Rivington's innocence, and she has affected me with some of her enthusiasm."

The effect of this to me astonishing communication, which presumed an acquaintance between "Lady Muriel" and my Janet, on the person to whom it was addressed was marked and instantaneous. His brows contracted in a deep scowl, and he waved his hand with a gesture of impatience.

"Don't waste your sweetness on such a scoundrel. There was no doubt that he was guilty—any more than there is that he will speedily be caught and hanged," was the amiable comment which, accompanied with a glare around that chanced to rest on me, filled me with nervous apprehension.

"You speak so violently that the wish might well be father to the thought," said the girl coldly.

"Not at all. I know nothing about the case, and care less." And then, with the obvious intention of changing the subject, my unknown detractor exclaimed, "By Jove! look at that big steamer we are passing—a troopship, I think."

We had reached the narrowest part of the Solent, where the long spit of shingle terminating in Hurst Castle stretched out toward the Wight opposite, and through which the pent-up current swirls like a mill-race seaward. The girl turned suddenly to look at the huge vessel that was rapidly nearing us, and in her excitement put her feet on the lower rail and leaned over. What followed happened so quickly that recollection fails me to describe it. The girl, who had been called Lady Muriel, overbalanced herself and fell into the sea; the captain rang down a sharp "stop" to the engine-room; a deck-hand began to fumble with a recalcitrant life-buoy; a glance at the man who had

first right of rescue told me that instead of availing himself of it he was running distractedly to and fro, plucking at his waxed mustache.

In that supreme moment I forgot everything—forgot that I was a condemned criminal, to whom attracted attention might probably mean death, forgot that I wore a disguise that salt water might ruin; forgot, in fact, all that was vital to my own interests in face of the imminent catastrophe of a fellow creature drowning before my eyes. Shaking off Herzog's restraining hand, I plunged overboard and struck out for the limp figure just floating to the surface after the first immersion. As she was sinking again I managed to grasp her dress, and so to hold her up till the steamer had backed down to us. By the time we had been helped on board I was nearly exhausted and was only conscious that Herzog, as he led me below in an iron clutch, murmured in my ear: "Idiot! were you trying to put the noose round your neck? If the springs of those false whiskers hadn't held you'd have been a dead man the day after tomorrow."

They warmed and dried me before the furnace below, Herzog superintending the operation with professional care, and procuring a change of clothes from my recently-purchased wardrobe. During the process I was too dazed to think of anything except to rejoice that I had saved a life, but when I stood up, dry and comfortable again, yet apprehending a fresh outbreak of abuse from my conductor, I saw that he had recovered his chronic good-humor.

"You might have ruined everything by that rash

act," he said, as we returned to the deck. "You would have done so if I had used gum for those whiskers instead of springs. As it is, you have begun well, my friend, and have established your footing in your victim's camp. You will experience no difficulty in approaching his lordship now."

"Why?" I asked, not comprehending his mood.

"That dainty piece of femininity which you pulled out of the water is no less a personage than Lady Muriel Crawshay, Lord Alphington's daughter," he whispered with a horrid chuckle in my ear. "I shall see to it that you are a *persona grata* now, my friend. You shall be asked to the house. You will get your chance for the stroke, which is to make history, at close quarters."

The treacherous suggestion sickened me, and I needed all my self-restraint to keep from telling him that he was mistaken if he expected his murderous mission to benefit by the rescue. Luckily at that moment a diversion was caused by Lady Muriel's maid, who came with a prettily-worded message of thanks from her mistress. Lady Muriel was below, changing into dry things and recovering from the shock, but she hoped to have an opportunity of thanking me in person before we landed.

That, however, was not to be, for directly the boat touched the pier Herzog hurried me ashore, and Lady Muriel had not yet reappeared on deck.

"It would never have done to let her thank you amid all this hurly-burly," he explained, as we walked up the pier ahead of the other passengers. "It might have made a premature end of the whole business.

Now she will be certain to look you up at our lodgings, and it shall not be my fault if the acquaintance does not ripen."

CHAPTER IV

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

AT the pier-head a surprise of the pleasantest kind was in store for me. Herzog stopped for a moment to instruct the pier-master what to do with our luggage.

"There are two portmanteaus on the steamer, one labeled 'Martin' and the other 'Doctor Barrables,'" he said. "Please send a porter up with them to 'Springthorpe,' where we have taken rooms."

I walked on at Herzog's side, wondering if my ears had deceived me, for if I had heard aright it seemed that the hand of Fate was strong upon me—for good or evil, who could say? "Springthorpe" was, I knew, the name of the house where Janet and her father, Colonel Chilmark, had been lodging since the winter. From that address she had sent me several letters while I was in prison, both before and after my trial. It would go hard with me if, staying under the same roof with my love, I could not obtain speech with her and tell her my desperate case.

"You have already engaged rooms?" I hazarded, mastering my emotion as we trudged up the steep

road leading to the scattered clusters of red-brick villas that form the rising watering-place of Totland Bay. The attitude I had assumed toward my task made it absolutely necessary that I should evince an eager and intelligent interest in our programme.

"I do not jump in the dark, my friend," my companion replied. "I have selected our *pied-à-terre* for two good reasons. The first and most important is that our windows overlook the grounds of 'Ardmore,' the mansion where Lord Alphington is to spend his leisure. The second, of almost equal consequence, is that there is only accommodation for one other set of lodgers, the present ones being people, according to my information, who are not at all likely to interfere with our plans. A retired Indian Staff Corps colonel nursing a deranged liver with the aid of a devoted daughter is not a combination that should prove dangerous to men with a secret like ours."

The Colonel's liver! How I blessed that tremendous factor in my fortunes at that moment. It was owing to that disorganized organ that my engagement to Janet was a secret one. Nobody knew of it but ourselves and my solicitor. I had only met Colonel Chilmark twice, but those two occasions had been enough to convince me that Janet paid a just tribute to his temper in not wishing to divulge our mutual compact till we were in a position to marry. After my arrest, she had written to beg to be allowed to show her faith in me by proclaiming our engagement, but my legal advisers had been dead against it. Not only would it have furnished the prosecution with another weapon in an additional motive for my alleged

crime, but it would have doomed the girl to the life-long disgrace of having been associated with me.

That we had never been avowed lovers was greatly in my favor now, for I might be able to communicate with her before Herzog discovered that he had chanced to establish me in close propinquity to such a staunch ally.

Five minutes' walk brought us to "Springthorpe" —a pretty little house standing in a shady garden. As we passed up the path to the front door my heart beat wildly, for there, at the open window facing us, sat Colonel Chilmark, smoking and reading a newspaper. He looked up at our approach, and favored us with the jealous scrutiny of a seaside visitor appraising possible fellow-lodgers, and it was a good test of my disguise that he showed no signs of recognition. I must have been in his mind, too, for he had doubtless been reading the account of my escape.

The front door stood open, and the landlady herself darted out to meet us. I studied her anxiously, guessing how much might depend on her. I saw with dismay that she was a quick-moving, bright-eyed, alert little woman, who would be certain to see and hear every movement of her lodgers if she wanted to. Should she prove as inquisitive as she looked sharp I should have no easy task in disclosing myself to Janet.

"How do you do, Mrs. Krance? I have brought my patient up to time, you see," said Herzog, playing his horrid part with the ponderous affability of a pompous medico. "Our rooms are ready, I presume?"

Mrs. Krance hesitated in her reply. Her small birdlike eyes seemed to be mastering every feature of my countenance, and trembling before her devouring gaze I feared that something had gone wrong with my disguise. But the ordeal passed, and she ushered us in.

"Yes, Dr. Barrables, the rooms are quite ready. You will find everything to your liking, I am sure," she said jerkily, as she opened the door of the room opposite that in which Colonel Chilmark was sitting. "There is only one alteration I have been obliged to make in the arrangements you stipulated for. I cannot possibly put you both in the same bedroom."

"But that was the essential part of the bargain, Mrs. Krance," said Herzog with displeasure in his voice.

"I cannot help it, sir," the landlady replied. "The village is so full, and there has been such a demand for extra bedsteads on hire that I could not procure two small ones to go into the bedroom you chose, in place of the full-sized bedstead there. And there isn't space for the only other bedstead I have, also a full-sized one, to be moved in. Mr. Martin will have to occupy the next room to yours—unless you would prefer to look elsewhere, though I don't believe there are any vacant apartments in the place."

"The room you propose for Mr. Martin has the same aspect as mine?" said Herzog, after a pause.

"Exactly the same, sir—over our little bit of garden into the grounds of 'Ardmore,' with a glimpse of the sea beyond," was the reply.

"Very well, we must make the best of it," said

Herzog with evident reluctance. "You can send us up a snack of something, and then we shall probably go for a walk."

As soon as we were alone in the sitting-room, Herzog came up to me, and, resting his hands on my shoulders, looked me full in the eyes. I returned the stare boldly, for I saw that he was trying to read my inmost soul. Finally he relaxed his grasp and broke into a disagreeable laugh.

"I do not think you are so foolish as to try to take advantage of the mistake about the bedrooms, my friend, but if there is anything of that sort in your mind do not forget that success in giving me the slip would also mean success in getting yourself hanged," he said softly.

"Why do you keep harping on that?" I replied, affecting to be irritated by his suspicions. "So long as my bedroom window gives a fair shot into the 'Ardmore' grounds you will have no reason to grumble. I am playing for a bigger stake than you, you know."

He appeared to be satisfied, and proposed that we should go upstairs and view the new arrangement which had unexpectedly thwarted his intention not to let me out of his presence by day or by night. Bracing myself in case we should meet Janet on the stairs, I accompanied him to the upper floor, where, after a glance into the room he had originally selected for our joint use, he led me into the next one—a slightly smaller apartment, not quite so well furnished.

It was the window that interested him, and me also,

for the matter of that. Immediately beneath it was the small back garden of the house we were in; but beyond that, separated by the terminal hedge, was a lovely vista of well-kept lawns and shrubberies, with a peep of a large modern mansion between the trees. I was determined to take the wind out of Herzog's sails this time.

"Look at that seat under the lime tree by the fountain," I whispered. "The distance, I judge, to be a hundred and twenty yards. If Lord Alphington sits there I could pick him off with a sporting rifle to a certainty. That is," I added doubtfully, "if you mean to entrust me with firearms."

He gave me one of his quick glances. Yes, I think that the suppressed eagerness in my tone really did deceive him that time, for he broke into the low-chuckled comment:—"When the chance comes, I shall find a weapon for you, never fear. But I hardly think that it will be a thing that makes a noise and might compromise your presumed medical guardian. You seem to have got your knife, figuratively, into his lordship, my noble captain; perhaps I shall be able to engineer an opportunity for you to do so literally."

He was gaining confidence in me, I could see, but was not yet quite convinced. I was fighting for my life, more or less in the dark, remember, and to deceive this man was the essence of a righteous cause. I essayed another stroke on the anvil of his unbelief.

"Look here!" I blurted out impetuously. "The chances from the next room are the same as from here, whatever you may be planning. If it will

make you easier about me, why shouldn't we both occupy the same bed in there? I don't mind, if you don't."

I had struck home. His brow cleared and his baggy cheeks rippled in a voluminous smile. "No, my friend, it is not necessary," he said. "Why should we sacrifice our comfort, when we see eye to eye in this matter? Come, let us refresh the inner man before we investigate further."

For the present Herzog believed in me. How long should I be able to sustain that belief?

So, ostensibly on terms of perfect accord, we descended to the sitting-room and partook of the meal which Mrs. Krance had prepared for us. As we were discussing it a well-loved voice sounded in the passage outside our door, and, a moment later, looking through the window, I saw my Janet's trim figure pass down the path and disappear through the garden gate into the road. She was walking quickly, as though under the influence of some excitement.

My heart thrilled at the probable cause. She must have heard of my escape from jail, and the thought of her reception of the news, not daring to let her father see her interest in it, brought home to me the slow agony she must have suffered since my conviction. To have had a lover lying under sentence of death, and to have been without comfort or sympathy, must have been little short of martyrdom.

And how was I to gain speech of her, with the lynx eyes of my custodian ever on me?

CHAPTER V

I TRY A RUSE

AS my association with Herzog progressed, the more was I convinced that he was a many-sided man. He had the faculty, or at least the semblance, of detaching himself from the deadly purpose in hand, though without ever losing sight of it, and of thoroughly enjoying his surroundings—his meat, his drink, his excellent cigars, and his own conversation. It may be that he only feigned this attitude in order to throw me off my guard, but I am inclined to think that some of it was natural to him.

"Come," he said, when we had finished our lunch, "let us combine business with pleasure and take a stroll. As a soldier you will want to reconnoiter your ground, while as a student of seascapes I shall be able to indulge my hobby. There is nothing like a combination of purple heather, blue water, and lapping tides to make a world-wearied man feel young again."

No one would have suspected the speaker of endeavoring to compass the death of the greatest statesman of the age by cold-blooded murder, and when we had sallied forth, still under the vigilant eye of

Colonel Chilmark at his window, I plucked up spirit to rally him on the subject.

"You are pretty cheerful," I said, "considering that if I succeed in killing the Prime Minister and am caught afterwards, you will most assuredly be hanged as an accessory before and after the act."

Had I touched him on the raw? For one fleeting second I thought so, from the swift contraction of his brows and the quaking of his baggy cheeks. But no. He placed his forefinger alongside his fleshy nose and solemnly winked at me.

"Make your mind easy on my account, and also on your own," he chuckled. "In the fact that I shall take good care that you are not caught lies my safety, and yours. Within limits we are hunting in couples —with this difference, that if the catastrophe you foreshadow should occur, I have a nice little bolt-hole, all cut and dried, to wriggle out of. But his lordship does not arrive till the day after to-morrow, so let us shove black care into the background to-day. By George! what a view."

We had turned out of the road in which we lodged, and had passed round into that on which "Ardmore" fronted. It ran at right angles to the cliffs, and both ahead of us and to the left stretched the glorious panorama that had called forth Herzog's exclamation. Under a cloudless sky the sea, framed in the emerald leafage of the nearer distance, shimmered in the dancing sun-rays, while the grand curve of the island coast-line swept round to the wave-washed sentinels of the Solent, the Needles Rocks.

I gave vent to what was intended to be a snort of

disdain. "I have no taste for scenery so long as my neck is in danger," I growled. "These appear to be the entrance gates of Alphington's residence. Why should we not call to inquire if Lady Muriel is any worse for her ducking? It would give me an opportunity of prospecting the lay of the land."

But Herzog, as I had hoped he would, dissented vigorously from the proposal. "I perceive that I shall have to ride you on the curb," he said. "It would be a fool's trick, betokening eagerness and possibly engendering suspicion, to do any such thing. The first overtures must come from the other side."

In spite of his prohibition, I lingered for a moment at the gates, peering up the carriage-drive, and pretending to scrutinize windows and doors, till Herzog plucked me angrily by the sleeve.

"You will give the show away if you carry on so," he snarled. "I have a plan of the house, which you can safely study indoors if it becomes necessary. By reconnoitering your ground I meant that you should master the geography of the neighborhood, for it is most probable that it will be in the open country that you will get your chance."

So we started for an exploration of the lanes and by-ways, taking an inland course towards Freshwater first, and returning to Totland by way of the heather-clad warren. Any minute a breach of confidence on my part toward Herzog, or close pressure by the pursuers, who were in full cry after me, might drive me to fly for my life, and I had used my walk, not, as I led my companion to believe, to search for convenient spots to kill Lord Alphington, but rather

in looking about for routes of retreat in case of emergency.

In all truth it was a difficult place to win free from. I was not only on an island, but on a narrow promontory of it, bounded on three sides by the sea—a populous triangle at any time, but now ten-fold so by reason of the summer visitors. We met girls in blouses and young men in flannels, afoot and on bicycles, at every turn, and more than once I heard these gay butterflies chattering as we passed about "the escaped murderer," and speculating as to his recapture.

Yet, if flight were difficult, I found that, small as was the area at my disposal, there were several routes that could be attempted. To reach the mainland I could either take steamer at Totland or at Yarmouth for Lymington, or I could make my way northward across the island to Ryde or Cowes, and there embark for Portsmouth or Southampton—provided I could lay hands on some money. There was plenty at my bankers, waiting to be handed over to Janet under a will I had made in prison, so soon as I should have been hanged, but I could not get at it.

Speculating gloomily on my lack of funds, I put the question to Herzog:—"How am I to get away after I have settled Alphington? I can't make tracks for South America without a supply of cash."

"You will have a sufficiency—when you have earned it. I have gained faith in you, my friend. You really must have a little in me," was all the reply he would vouchsafe. Evidently I was not to be trusted with money before the end was gained.

I could not press him further, for we were debouching onto the turfed promenade in front of the hotel, now, in the cooler hours of the afternoon, crowded with visitors. Almost before I realized what was happening, we came face to face with Lady Muriel and her male companion of the morning, and with them—Janet, a whole history of anguish in her troubled eyes.

I lived a lifetime in the ensuing ten seconds. I almost felt the drop give way under my feet. Would my love recognize me under my disguise, and, if so, would she have the self-control to conceal it? After one furtive glance I dared not look at her to see, but in that flash of time I thought I detected a faint tinge of color mounting in the pale, wan cheeks.

Lady Muriel advanced with extended hand, and very prettily expressed her gratitude for the service rendered.

"It was naughty of you to run away from the steamer without giving me an opportunity of thanking you," she added. "My father will be here in a day or two, and I am sure he will want to join his thanks with mine."

Afraid of the effect my voice might have on Janet, and conscious that Lady Muriel's escort was regarding me with a sinister scowl, I only mumbled a few incoherent words. I positively *felt* Herzog's glare on the nape of my neck, and I knew that, from his point of view, I was acquitting myself badly.

"Let me introduce you to my rescuer and his medical attendant," Lady Muriel chattered on, turning to those with her: "Mr. Marske and Miss Chilmark

—Mr. Martin and Doctor Barrables. You see, Mr. Martin, I have already ascertained the name of my preserver from the pier-master who had charge of your luggage. I was not going to let you off as easily as your modesty seemed to expect."

In bowing to Mr. Marske, whom I guessed from her association with him to be a relative of Sir Gideon Marske, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I noticed a curious curl of his lip at her pronouncement of Herzog's pseudonym. Having effected the introduction, Lady Muriel, with charming impetuosity, turned to accompany us, chatting gaily. By an adroit movement Marske took possession of Herzog, going on a little in advance, with the result that I followed with Lady Muriel and Janet.

I was walking on Lady Muriel's left, and Janet on her right, so that for purposes of secret communication, with this lively barrier between us, my sweetheart and I were poles asunder. Yet it might be a case of now or never. Every minute lost in making myself and my desperate straits known to Janet was a step toward the gallows. Surely my wits could find a straw to clutch at.

No, not a straw, but a common bit of thorny hedge-rose, plucked and cast aside by some tripper earlier in the day. I spied it lying on the turf ahead of us, and so contrived as to steer Lady Muriel straight over it. Would it? Would it? Yes, it stuck to her dainty skirts and trailed after her, hampering her graceful gait and causing instant annoyance.

"Would you mind, Mr. Martin? There's a horrid thing on my dress," she turned to me graciously.

I was on my knees in a moment, fumbling clumsily and to no purpose.

"Miss—ah, Chilmark," I said, intentionally hesitating at the name and not daring to look up. "Your fingers are probably more deft than mine. Would you? Ah, now we shall be all right."

And then, as my dear girl stooped to help me, I whispered in her ear—

"For God's sake command yourself. It is I—Arthur. Lodging at Springthorpe. Must see you, unknown to the man with me."

Her soft palm, after detaching the bramble, closed for a second on my wrist. I took it as a signal that she understood.

CHAPTER VI

CREAKING OF THE STAIR

WITH the diclosure of my identity to Janet I felt that my affairs had entered on a new phase. But, though it had cleared the ground of one obstacle earlier than I could have hoped for, it could not be deemed to have brought me much nearer to the solution of the mystery that enshrouded the death of my mother and sister. By that alone could I put myself in a position to defy Herzog and expose the conspiracy against the Prime Minister.

Though Janet now knew me, and knew also that I was staying in the same house with her, I was as far as ever from obtaining the private interview with her that was necessary to turn her loving loyalty to a practical use. That interview would have to be of considerable duration, too, in order to explain fully the importance I attached to that last strange utterance of poor Clara in her death agony. And when it was explained I greatly feared that it would be beyond my dear girl's powers to cope with the puzzle in the limited time at our disposal.

Yet the revelation of my personality was a distinct advance, and when I sat down to dinner with Herzog in our lodgings I was in better spirits than since the judge had pronounced my doom. Sometimes, when Mrs. Krance opened the door to bring in a fresh course, I could hear Colonel Chilmark's querulous tones and Janet's sweet voice in the room across the passage, and I had much ado, under my companion's inscrutable eyes, to dissemble my interest in our fellow-lodgers.

Curiously enough it was Herzog himself who referred to them, and his reference caused me a qualm of alarm. The man's methods were so subtle that I could not be sure he was not testing my apparent listlessness about the Chilmarks. He had been in front of us when I released Lady Muriel's dress from the bramble on the cliff-walk, but he was the kind of person who has eyes in the back of his head.

"Nice people—those opposite," he remarked with a shrewd twinkle in his inconstant eyes. "The girl, at any rate. It is on the cards that I may have to cultivate the Colonel's acquaintance before our little business is finished."

"The less we have to do with outsiders the better, I should say," was the growling comment I forced myself to make. Was I, I wondered, playing the outcast, truculent villain to the life, or only bungling my part, to the secret amusement of this close observer? I would have given the world to know.

"How did Mr. Marske strike you?" he went on, chatting just as if we were what we professed to be —two seaside idlers with nothing to do but gossip.

"I thought him a man in a bit of a—what shall we say—a predicament."

"In what way?" I snapped, for Mr. Marske didn't trouble me two straws.

"He seemed to me to be like Issachar—an ass between two burdens," grinned Herzog. "In other words, I diagnosed him as a man making duty love to one woman, while his real attraction was toward the other."

I was sorely tried, but under cover of helping myself to a banana I managed to laugh, "And which might be the object of what you call the 'duty' love?"

"Lady Muriel, of course; being from the matrimonial standpoint a prize to a penniless man," was the reply that once more strained my powers of self-control almost to breaking point. The horrible inference that this fellow Marske, who had gratuitously, and in my hearing, gone out of his way to vilify me, and who had inspired me with instinctive repugnance, should be making eyes at Janet was gall and wormwood.

"A sort of Blue Beard," I forced myself to comment carelessly.

"Yes, his record would blacken a whole street," Herzog mused aloud. "And the trouble of it is that —ah, bah! what am I talking of?" he checked himself. "After all, I am discussing the gentleman with one to whom the subject of records must be a sore point. A thousand pardons, my friend, I did not offend intentionally."

His reluctance to hurt my feelings—the feelings, be it understood, of one whom he deemed a cruel

murderer—was, I felt sure, an excuse for stopping short in a sentence not meant for my ears. It was a revelation to me that this Sphinx-like plotter could be guilty of such a laxity as letting his tongue run away with him. That he would do so except under the strongest emotion I could not believe, but what could there be in common between this conspirator against the Prime Minister and the son of a member of the Cabinet? I could not answer the enigma, but I was not likely to lose sight of it.

"Come," said Herzog at the conclusion of our repast, "let us go over to the hotel and play a game of billiards, or look on if we cannot get the table. There must be nothing mysterious about our movements. To play the hermit in a place like this would be to attract attention, and that might result in——"

He took his fat neck in his white capable-looking hand and made a significant motion as of choking himself. I understood the allusion and saw the force of his argument, though it was distressing to have to leave the house. I had hoped all through dinner that we should sit in the garden, perhaps, or in our sitting-room with the door open, and that I might be able to find or make an opportunity of speech with Janet. To think of her as just across that narrow passage, eating her heart out for that opportunity, was maddening.

However, preserving my chronic demeanor of surly obedience, I rose and went out with him in the dusk to the hotel, where I was glad to find the billiard table not only occupied but engaged—four deep. There was nothing to do but to sit in a corner and

watch the play, while Herzog talked to his neighbors on the settee and advertised our ostensible reason for being at Totland. I was treated with due respect as a wealthy invalid traveling with his private medical man, and I dare say I looked ill enough. It was not conducive to a robust appearance to hear the smart young stockbrokers and pursy business men from London wagering their sovereigns for and against the recapture of "the Brockenhurst murderer."

At ten o'clock we left the hotel and returned to "Springthorpe," and on approaching the house my hopes sank as I saw that there was no light in the Chilmarks' sitting-room. Janet and her father had retired for the night, and I had lost a day in the task before me.

Hearing us enter, Mrs. Krance appeared from the back regions, her little ferret face encircled in curl papers.

"I don't know if you gentlemen want anything more," she said with acerbity. "This is an early house, and I was about to go to bed."

Herzog gave her a sharp glance and pulled out his watch. "Why, it isn't half-past ten," he replied. "Come," he added in his oiliest manner, "you are not yourself to-night, Mrs. Krance. Something has upset you."

"Well, yes; it isn't to you I ought to be cross, Doctor," said the woman obviously mollified. "The fact is my other lodgers, that I thought were permanent, gave me notice to-day of leaving at the end of the week. Then they took it back again, after

the young lady came in from her walk, and want to stay on indefinite. I don't hold with such blowing hot and cold, and me given no reasons."

For the fraction of a second Herzog's brows contracted. "No, Mrs. Krance, it is always annoying when we cannot divine people's reasons," he said, his eyes fixed on me as he spoke. "But if you are not to lose your lodgers, all's well that ends well. So far as we are concerned, by all means go to bed as soon as you like, for we are going up too. One word, though. Mr. Martin is an invalid, you know. Are you a light sleeper—in case I should want hot water, or anything, for him in the night?"

"I can't say that I am, sir; I have such a hard day's work that I sleep pretty sound," the landlady replied.

"Ah, well, let us hope that the occasion for disturbing your rest will not arise," said Herzog affably. "Good-night to you, Mrs. Krance, and pleasant dreams."

The breeze with the waspish little woman over, we took our candlesticks and went upstairs. I felt that it was a tribute to my duplicity that Herzog parted with me at the door of his bedroom without any warning against attempts to escape. I had lulled him into complete confidence in my motives and intentions—unless, horrible thought, his net was drawn so securely round me that he knew I could not break away from him. I remembered that at Southampton he had alluded to subordinates. Possibly he was putting his trust in them to watch the house, though neither on the boat nor since our landing in

the island had I seen him speak to any persons who would be likely to be his colleagues.

Left alone in my bedroom I reviewed the situation as I mechanically began to undress. It seemed hopeless to gain speech with Janet that night, though she was in the same house, and must be only a few yards away. Yet, that she meant to endeavor to grant my whispered appeal for an interview was evident from the news indirectly brought by Mrs. Krance. The revocation of the Chilmarks' notice to leave I looked on in the light of a message. It was a blessed promise that Janet would stick to me, and I could only trust that fortune would be kinder to me on the morrow and allow me to meet her.

At least there was a change in my circumstances for the better. Two nights ago I had slept in the condemned cell at Winchester; last night I had slept in a shady hotel at Southampton; to-night I was going to sleep, if I could, in a decent lodging in a rising watering-place. If I could keep up this rate of arithmetical progression, where should I be at the end of Herzog's fortnight? Nothing short of being honorably free, with character and friends restored, would satisfy me, and that, as my sudden fit of elation passed, I perceived to be nearly as far from realization as ever.

For what mattered the slight increase in personal comfort, what would Janet's propinquity and loving care avail me, so long as I was a hunted criminal, with the black shadow of a recorded sentence hanging over me? Even if I could fool Herzog a little longer in the pretense that I meant to carry out his mur-

derous behest, the end would be as surely and inexorably the same as though I had never quitted the prison cell.

Unless—some unseen devil whispered in my ear—*unless* I ceased to deceive Herzog and steeled myself to sear my soul with the stupendous crime he had liberated me to commit.

With a shudder I drove the vile temptation away, and presently flung myself on the bed and slept. But sound slumber was not for a poor nerve-racked creature such as I had become, and after a while I was awakened by the sound of movement, faint but unmistakable, beyond the lath and plaster partition separating Herzog's room from mine.

Late as was the hour my custodian was up and stirring. Yes, and he was doing more than that—he was stealthily leaving the house. For after I had lain breathlessly, but in vain, waiting for a repetition of the sounds in the next room, I heard another of a different kind a little further off.

Not loud enough to awaken a sleeper, but quite audibly to one listening with straining ears as I was, a stair creaked.

CHAPTER VII

JANET READS THE RIDDLE

THROWING on some clothes, I softly opened my bedroom door and stole out on to the landing in time to gain confirmation of my surmise. There was a window at the stair-head, overlooking the front garden and the road, and, sure enough, there was Herzog, plainly distinguishable in the moonlight, in the act of passing out through the gate. Turning to the left, he walked off briskly and disappeared.

My first sensation was one of intense curiosity as to why he should have gone out at such an hour. That important business had taken him afield was self-evident, since, for all his apparent confidence in me, he would not willingly have left me unguarded. His nocturnal expedition, too, must have been premeditated, I guessed, when his questioning of Mrs. Krance as to her powers of sleep recurred to me.

But what was the use of speculating on the motives of such a man, when his exodus had left me unsupervised, for a few minutes at any rate, under the roof that covered Janet? I turned wildly from the window to scan the doors giving on to the landing, won-

dering which was hers, when, lo! one of them opened, and there stood Janet herself, peering at me in the half-light.

Then she stole forward with a suppressed cry of recognition and pillowed her fair head on my breast. What followed—the few words we dared whisper—concern no one but ourselves, nor could I remember them if I would. Janet was the first to recover herself, and with her finger to her lips led me into the room whence she had emerged.

"This is no time for false prudery," she observed, when she had softly closed the door. "We might be heard if we talked on the landing, and my room has an equal advantage as to the window. The outlook is the same, and we shall be able to watch for that man's return while we talk."

"You heard him go out?" I said, taking up my station behind the curtain.

"Heard him and saw him," my brave lass replied. "Did you think that I should do anything but wait and watch till I had spoken with you?"

Recognizing that every moment was of value if I was to make her understand how I was situated, I began my narrative at once, and without any preamble told her of all that had happened in connection with my escape from jail, and of the fearful condition that had been laid on me by my mysterious liberator. Naturally she was greatly shocked that such a dastard design should be hatching against Lord Alphington, but her horror was evidently blunted by her concern for me.

"You must get away from this terrible man's

clutches, Arthur," she insisted. "With my help surely it can be managed, for the chance he has given you to-night shows that he is not infallible."

But I had to dash her hopes with the expressed conviction that Herzog would never have left the house, even trusting me as I believed he did, unless he had taken steps to prevent my eluding him. And I went on to say that life would be of no use to me, that I would just as soon go back and be hanged, if I could not turn my spuriously-won respite to good account.

"I have no mind to be a hunted fugitive for the rest of my days, which would be my lot if I could shake Herzog off," I said. And I proceeded to tell her how, when the venal warder had broached the news of my coming escape, my one idea had been to utilize it to clear my name by finding the real scoundrel who had done my mother and sister to death. I narrated the grounds of that forlorn hope—my dying sister's last words: *"Man, mask, Roger."*

Janet had stationed herself behind the other window curtain to help me in my vigil for Herzog's return. The slanting moonbeams fell on her motionless figure in the pretty blue dressing-gown and touched her beautiful, wistful face with a tender glow all through our scarcely audible conversation. But now, at the sound of those to me meaningless words, she started, and her dear eyes shone with swift excitement.

"Say those words again, Arthur," she scarcely breathed.

"Man, mask, Roger," I repeated. "Clara must

have referred to a man called Roger who wore a mask, probably for the purpose of his crime."

The wash of the tide on the shore of the bay alone broke the silence as Janet gazed across at me. A dawn of hope, in which a great fear mingled, had come into her face.

"Arthur," she whispered, "what if the man's *name* sounded like that—not *mask*, but *m-a-r-s-k-e*? I know a Roger Marske. You saw him with Lady Muriel and me this afternoon."

My heart gave a great bound at the suggestion, which would have occurred to me before had I known the christian and surnames Roger and Marske in combination. The ingenious idea had much to recommend it. There was my instinctive dislike of the man at first sight; there was his viciously-expressed confidence in my guilt; there was his evident desire to check and thwart Lady Muriel's interest in my escape by withholding the newspaper from her.

Yet, on the other hand, I had never heard of him before in my life—certainly not in connection with my mother and sister, nor had I the slightest reason for believing that they were acquainted with him. That being so, what earthly object could he have had in compassing their death—always provided that Clara's incoherent utterance was intended to indicate her murderer?

Clutching at straws, however, as I was, I could not afford to throw cold water on any clue—still less on one that had in it so many elements of probability.

"If we could find that this Roger Marske ever had any sort of association with my people I should know

that you had read the riddle aright," I said. "And then all would depend on something being discovered in the nature of that association to connect him with the double murder. For it would not follow that he murdered Clara because she mentioned him with her dying breath."

Janet's fingers quivered so that she shook the curtain which she was holding back for a better view of the road. "Arthur, this Roger Marske is a bad man," she panted in her agitation. "He is down here to pursue Lady Muriel Crawshay with attentions which she loathes, yet has to tolerate owing to her father's foolish infatuation for the son of a member of his Cabinet. And Mr. Marske thinks it consistent with his honor to annoy me with his equally odious but less definite attentions at the same time."

"The brute!" I muttered, impressed by this confirmation of Herzog's insight.

I asked Janet how she came to know such big-wigs as the daughter of the Prime Minister and the son of the Chancellor of the Exchequer; for the Chilmarks, though well born, had not been in the habit of mixing in such exalted circles. But it was all very simple when it came to be told. The acquaintance was one which would never have been struck up in London, but which germinated and grew quite naturally in a small seaside resort free from the usual "attractions," and priding itself on its exclusiveness. Lady Muriel, having got "run down" half way through the London season, had been packed off to Ardmore, and the influx of visitors not having then set in, the girls had met in their walks about the cliffs,

had fore-gathered, and finally became devoted friends.

"She is the sweetest soul, and so sympathetic, that she soon saw that I was in trouble," added Janet rather diffidently. "One day, when we were sitting in the heather at the back of Alum Bay, Arthur, I broke down and told her of my dreadful grief. She is as staunch a believer in your innocence as I am myself."

And this was the daughter of the man whom I had been released to kill.

"Can we not confide everything to her, and beg her to enlist her father's sympathy?" I clutched at another straw.

But Janet, wiser than I was, pointed out the danger of such a course. However well disposed Lord Alphington might be, he would be powerless to save me unless my innocence had been clearly established; though, as a cold and haughty statesman, hidebound in officialism, he would probably pooh-pooh the whole story as an invention, and hand me over to the hangman. The risk was too great to be run.

"I am only a girl, Arthur, but I must fight your battle alone," my brave sweetheart went on firmly. "No one must share our secret, at any rate, till I have achieved partial success. Who is in charge of your mother's cottage in the New Forest?"

"Sarah Leven, an old servant, who was to remain till—till the things had been sold by auction," I answered.

"What would be her feeling about you?"

"She was devoted to all of us, poor soul—has known me from a boy, but like most other people she probably

thinks me guilty," I replied with unjustifiable bitterness.

"Let us hope not," returned Janet gravely. "In any case I shall run over by the first boat to-morrow and explore 'The Glen,' is it not called? Ah, stand perfectly still! Look there!"

With the warning exclamation her voice sank so as to be scarcely audible, and, without moving, I followed the direction of her frightened gaze. There, standing in the middle of the roadway, the moonlight shining on his broad, fleshy face, was Herzog staring straight at the window. In our preoccupation of quick question and answer we must have relaxed our vigilance long enough for him to make a stealthy approach on his return to the house.

Had he seen us—or, rather, *me*? For there would be nothing to arouse his suspicions in a sight of Janet alone. At any rate he gave no sign, but stood there motionless, exercising on me a snakelike fascination till, with a visible shrug of his portly shoulders, he abandoned his position and came swiftly and silently toward the garden gate.

"Get back to your room," Janet implored in a whisper.

I needed no second bidding, but at the door I paused for one breathless second to ask:

"How shall we communicate again?"

"Go at once," she urged. "I will find a way."

So I quickly crossed the landing and had scarcely closed my door when the stairs creaked again. A minute later I heard Herzog moving softly about in the next room.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE BRANKSOME PINES

THERE was nothing in Herzog's demeanor at breakfast next morning to show any diminution of his confidence in me. The undertone of sarcasm in which he sometimes indulged at my expense was entirely absent. The corporeal side of him seemed to be uppermost, and he appeared to be in the lazily sensuous mood natural to a man of full habit with nothing to do but eat, drink, and enjoy himself. I could not think that he had seen me at Janet's window the night before.

"The joy of life, my dear friend, is bubbling all over me this delightful morning," he remarked, as he sat down to a dish of bacon and eggs and helped himself plentifully.

To some extent I found his good-humor infectious, for before breakfast was over I saw Janet trip down the garden path and turn toward the pier. She had evidently not swerved from her intention to search for clues at "The Glen," and was on her way to catch the first boat for Lymington. I did not expect great things from her expedition, but a forlorn hope was better than no hope at all.

"This is our last real holiday for the Premier

arrives to-morrow," said Herzog presently, as he lit a cigar. "I propose to spend it in testing a certain theory that is causing me some uneasiness. There is an excursion steamer, due to call here at eleven o'clock, for Bournemouth, returning in the afternoon. We will take the trip in her to that gay watering-place, and be as frivolous as we can, unless——"

"Unless what?" I tried to abbreviate his somewhat theatrical pause.

"Unless there is stern work to do, my friend," he concluded quietly. "But that will only happen if my very doubtful theory proves correct."

It was all one to me how we spent the day. It was bound to be one of suspense anyhow, till Janet returned from the New Forest and found a way of apprising me of the success or failure of her journey. All that I was immediately concerned with was immunity from recapture, and for that I was relying entirely on Herzog. With his interest in the tragedy which he believed himself to be saving me for, he was not likely to subject me to undue risks.

And when the London papers came in, just before we started, I learned that my risk was already greatly minimized—or, at least, postponed. A Central News telegram from Queenstown, dated the night before, was given prominence under the sensational double head-lines:

THE ESCAPED MURDERER.

OFF TO AMERICA.

It has been ascertained by the police that Rivington went on board the *Carpathia* here just before she sailed this evening. The detectives arrived a few minutes too late to effect his

arrest, but the New York authorities have been informed by cable, and he will be met and detained on the arrival of the liner on the other side. In the case of a condemned criminal it is not thought that extradition formalities will be necessary.

Herzog, who had read the paragraph before handing it to me, chuckled at the visible astonishment with which I perused it.

"How was it worked?" he said in response to my mute inquiry. "You are scarcely old enough to remember the refrain of a song popular in the seventies, my young friend. It ran something like this: 'Bizzimark here, Bizzimark there—Bizzimark, Bizzimark everywhere.' Well, if you substitute Herzog for Bismarck you have it in a nutshell. I have my ramifications and resources distributed over a wide area, you see."

"This means, then, that I have a free run till the *Carpathia* reaches New York and the report is found to be false—say six days," said I.

"Except under a certain contingency which we go to prove, and which may require strenuous treatment," replied Herzog, taking up his soft felt hat. "Come, we will show ourselves on the cliff-walk before we go down to the pier. I have a reason for it."

At that comparatively early hour the popular promenade had few occupants besides nursemaids and their charges making their way to the beach. But conspicuous among the exceptions was Mr. Roger Marske, lounging on a seat and apparently wrapped in moody reflection. He affected not to see us, and after passing him two or three times, as

the excursion steamer was approaching, we descended to the pier. I wondered, without asking to be enlightened, whether Marske was Herzog's "reason" for that preliminary stroll.

I was further exercised on that point when, just as we had taken our seats on the upper deck of the steamer, Marske came hurriedly down the pier and also boarded her. He disappeared from sight among the crowd of trippers on the lower deck, and as he did not mount to the upper deck, I saw no more of him during the hour's run. Herzog showed no sign of having seen him at all, and as the last thing I wanted was to disclose my interest in Marske to my lynx-eyed companion, I kept my own counsel.

When the steamer ran alongside the pier at Bournemouth, Herzog lost no time in landing, and, still wearing the air of a schoolboy out for a holiday, proposed refreshments at the hotel opposite the pier gates. As we stood at the bar I noticed Roger Marske studying the photographs in the window of the library opposite. Herzog's eyes were on my face as I made the discovery, and he must have followed my gaze, but again he made no sign.

"Now for a tramp and a whiff of the pine woods," he said when he had finished his last sandwich and emptied his glass. "You are scarcely looking as fit as a man ought with—what shall we call it?—an ordeal of the nerves ahead. A little physical exercise will do you good."

As we left the hotel I saw nothing of Marske, who might, or might not, have gone into the library to purchase one of the views he had been admiring. We

climbed on to the West Cliff, and so struck out at a brisk pace which, after a two-mile walk, took us out of the residential quarter into the seclusion of the Branksome Woods. Herzog was in his most discursive vein, telling humorous anecdotes about his former experiences as a Surveyor of Taxes—an occupation which he seemed to have thoroughly enjoyed.

"Bleeding 'em, my friend—bleeding 'em to the white—was good fun, I can tell you, and so was ferreting out their affairs and tripping up their evasions," he wheezed. "I loved it, but I should have loved it better if I could have diverted more of the plunder into my own pocket."

Yet, though his reminiscences of prying into the incomes of needy old maids and struggling professional men were vigorously told, I was conscious all the time that he was trying, for purposes of his own, to keep me amused and distracted from surroundings. We were sitting on a fallen pine trunk at the edge of an oily, silent pool, when he suddenly broke off in the middle of one of his narratives, and pointed down the glade to where a glimpse of the sea was visible—turquoise blue behind the gloomy foreground.

"By George, my friend, but this spot has gripped me," he said, still apparently in his irresponsible mood. "Wait here a little while I go and gloat over that blend of colors. I can trust you," here he laid his big forefinger alongside his bulbous nose, "not to run away."

He left me and sauntered down the glade, standing for a moment at the end of the vista, and then, some-

what to my surprise, disappearing among the trees to the right. I sat still, and for over a minute had been listlessly wondering how Janet was faring at my mother's cottage, when a hand fell on my shoulder from behind.

Shaking myself free, I glanced quickly up and met the mocking gaze of Roger Marske.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and there was a note of triumph in the harsh tones of his voice. "Ah, I thought so."

"What did you think, and what do you mean by laying your hand on me?" I asked angrily, forgetting in my indignation that, in the eyes of the law, I had forfeited all right to resent anything, or even to speak as man to man.

I was to be quickly reminded, however. Marske broke into an unpleasant cackling laugh. "The same answer fits both your questions," he sneered. "I laid hands on you because I thought that you were disguised, and I wanted to have a look at you at close quarters. I perceive that I was right in my conjecture, and I have little doubt that I am right in another which I will venture to put forward."

"And that is?" I faltered. It is a degrading confession, but it had come to this, that I was actually longing for Herzog's presence.

"It is that you are Arthur Rivington—the escaped convict from Winchester," Roger Marske replied in sharp, *staccato* accents. And as he spoke he drew a little away from me and leveled a pistol at my head.

CHAPTER IX

HERZOG'S CLAWS

STRANGE to say, with that shining tube pointed at me I thought less of my obviously imminent peril than of the inference I drew from Roger Marske's apparent intention to shoot me. It would be the natural course for him to take if he were indeed guilty of the crime for which I had been condemned. Utterly unsuspected of it as he was, he would be able to say that he had met the escaped convict in a lonely place, and, being attacked by him, had shot him in self-defense. So with the greatest plausibility would he rid himself once for all of the danger which, presuming his guilt, he would know to be threatening him so long as I was at large, and probably using my liberty to clear my character at the expense of the real murderer.

It flashed through my mind that I must be the victim of some utterly inexplicable plot, at which Herzog had connived, and that the Alphington conspiracy was all moonshine, designed to draw me into the focus of Marske's revolver. Though why so much trouble should have been taken to confront me with that

weapon when Mr. Billington was to have hanged me on the morrow, I was at a loss to conjecture.

Suddenly, without relaxing his aim, Marske spoke.

"Why did you select 'Springthorpe,' at Totland, to stay at?" he asked.

I remembered that in words, at any rate, I had not admitted my identity, so I rode the high horse. "What the devil has that to do with you?" I tried to bluster, making a signal failure of it, I fear.

Marske scowled savagely at me. "My pretty fellow," he snarled, "I can answer the question for you, being equal to the simple addition sum of putting two and two together. You know Janet Chilmark, eh? She went off unexpectedly this morning on your business, eh?"

I made no reply, but my face must have told the tale, for I saw him steady his revolver to a surer aim, and I had given myself up for lost, when a well-known voice close by rang in my ears:

"Lower your pistol, Mr. Marske, and drop it on the ground, or take the consequences. I have got you covered, you see."

Yes, the pistol wavered, and finally drooped from the level of my head, but the command was not wholly obeyed at once. Marske still clutched the weapon, holding it muzzle downward, and glared unutterable things.

"Come, sir. I am not to be trifled with. I give you ten seconds to disarm yourself, or I will shoot you dead," came Herzog's smooth but peremptory threat.

This time the injunction was obeyed. Dropping

the pistol on the carpet of pine needles, Marske broke into a tirade of abuse and self-justification:

"The man is the escaped murderer—a fact of which you must have full cognizance," he exclaimed furiously. "I suppose you are prepared to pay the penalty for aiding and abetting him, and for preventing an honest citizen from recapturing him."

Relieved from the menace of Marske's weapon, I turned my head and saw Herzog, revolver in hand, advancing toward him from the trees at my right. My custodian's broad features were graver than I had seen them since the memorable interview when he had impressed his personality on me at the "Pilot's Rest" at Southampton.

"What is this nonsense about an escaped murderer?" he asked quietly.

"The fellow is the notorious Rivington. I taxed him with it and he did not deny it," returned Marske sullenly.

"Then I must deny it for him; and, further, as you bring a very serious charge against myself I shall convince you that it is false," Herzog said, picking up the dropped pistol and putting it in his pocket.

"If you will take a few steps with me in this direction I have no doubt that I shall be able to disabuse your mind of the error which has so nearly got you into trouble."

I saw Roger Marske gnaw his mustache in impotent rage, but there was something in Herzog's suave urbanity that was not to be denied, and the two moved off together down the glade. So long as they were within earshot of me nothing was said between them,

though Herzog busied himself with producing and unfolding a small document, which he seemed to peruse attentively. When they were some fifty yards away he began to talk in low tones, and at last he showed Marske the paper, without relaxing his grasp on it. Marske read it and then flung up his arms in a gesture that seemed to denote a combination of disgust and surrender. Then they turned and slowly retraced their steps to where I had resumed my seat on the pine trunk.

"My dear Martin," said Herzog as they approached, "the little misunderstanding is at an end. Mr. Marske recognizes his mistake and apologizes to both of us for making it. We must make allowances for an honest citizen—that I think was the phrase—desirious of doing his duty by the community. *Trop de zèle* has led many people into equally untenable positions."

That Marske was really convinced it was impossible to believe. The muttered apology, in which the only audible words were the important ones "Doctor Barrables" and "Mr. Martin," was accompanied by the fierce grin of a man beaten at a game in which he had believed himself a winner. Then, slightly raising his hat, he turned on his heel and vanished among the pines.

Herzog seated himself on the trunk at my side, and inflated his broad chest with a long breath of the aromatic air.

"So much," he said, "for the theory that I had conceived. It was unfortunately correct, but I have been able to combat it with weapons which our enter-

prising friend could not suspect me of holding. Let me congratulate you, my noble captain, on a very soldierly attitude in front of a leveled weapon, which, by the way, I must not forget to return to that aggressive gentleman at the first opportunity."

I could not tell him that if *my* theory, or rather Janet's, about Roger Marske were correct, there would never be a safe opportunity for returning him his pistol, so far as I was concerned. That he had meant to kill me in cold blood I had no doubt, and I wondered that my astute companion made no reference to his obvious intention. He could hardly have failed to observe it, even if he had not overheard the conversation that preceded his dramatic interference.

That point caused me a good deal of uneasiness. If Herzog had heard Roger Marske taxing me with an acquaintance with Janet my chances of future communication with her would be reduced to a minimum. And, apart from his having overheard anything, what connecting link could there have been in Herzog's mind between Marske and myself? That he had deliberately brought me into the Branksome pine woods, and there left me alone, knowing that Marske was following, I could not doubt. I had his own word for it that our expedition was intended to test a theory.

That theory unquestionably was that Marske suspected my identity, but how had Herzog detected the suspicion? By observing it, or *by having ascertained that there was a reason why Marske should fear me?*

Whichever was the true source of his action, it be-

came at once apparent that Herzog meant me to attribute it to the former.

"That unpleasant person must have spotted your disguise, and to avoid a repetition of such discoveries you had better discard those whiskers," he said, deftly detaching them. "Thanks to the newspaper reports of your flight to America you will not be searched for at present, and the absence of your mustache really makes all the necessary alteration."

"Unless I meet some one with whom I was acquainted," said I.

Herzog's eyes took on their harder expression. "Are you quite sure that you have not done so already?" he jerked out sharply.

I was sore troubled lest he alluded to my meeting with Janet the previous night. But no; as I remained silent he relieved my anxiety by thus explaining the question—

"You knew this fellow Marske before your conviction, eh?"

"Not at all. I never set eyes on him—never heard of him—till yesterday," I was able to answer truthfully.

Herzog relapsed into silence, gazing alternately at the distant peep of the sea and at the black tarn at our feet. Suddenly he picked up a stone and tossed it into the pool, frowning as he watched the circles widening from the central splash.

"Deep waters," I heard him mutter ruminatively. Then, jumping up, he changed his manner to frank friendliness again.

"Come, my noble captain," he said. "I am a

selfish creature to keep you on a spot that must have such disagreeable associations. Besides, we shall have to hurry if we are to be in time to join our fellow-trippers on the boat back to the Wight."

CHAPTER X

WHAT JANET DISCOVERED

WE caught the excursion steamer at Bournemouth and made the return journey without further incident or seeing anything of Roger Marske. As a result of the afternoon's adventure, he had either decided to get back to Totland by the Lymington route rather than travel with us, or he had altered his plans entirely—possibly to the extent of taking train for London.

Colonel Chilmark was in his accustomed place in his window at "Springthorpe" as we entered the garden gate, and the scrutiny which he bent on us from under his shaggy brows was an unexpected ordeal. He had not entered into my calculations when I had consented to the removal of the false whiskers, and now I stood before him in my old semblance, save for the lack of my mustache. His critical stare gave me a bad twenty seconds as we walked up the path, but before we reached the door he had carelessly resumed his everlasting newspaper.

The two occasions on which I had met him had evidently not stamped me on his memory to the ex-

tent of recognition in my altered guise. Fortunately, like all valetudinarians, the Colonel was self-centered, and moreover, thanks to my engagement to Janet having been kept secret, he had no particular interest in me—except, of course, as a notorious malefactor with whom he would not be likely to go out of his way to claim acquaintance.

We had hardly entered our sitting-room when Mrs. Krance appeared. She gave me a queer birdlike glance, which Herzog seemed to think demanded the explanation that I had been clean-shaved because of the heat. She sniffed, without comment.

"I have got a message for you gentlemen from the young lady," she said.

"From Miss Chilmark?" Herzog purred softly.

The landlady nodded, and continued: "Leastways she didn't send it as a message direct, but she told me she hoped you wouldn't make a noise, shutting your doors or anything. She's been over to the New Forest to-day, and went to bed with a bad headache directly she got back."

"Oh, we are very quiet folk and shall not disturb the lady," replied Herzog with a genuine carelessness that reassured me. He evidently did not suspect what I guessed—that the "message" was a real one with a hidden meaning in it intended for me alone. My dear girl, I felt sure, had taken this means of conveying to me that she had fulfilled her self-set task and had returned—a fact about which I should have been anxious if not informed. I could not be certain as to her motive in keeping to her room, but I did not believe in the "headache." I had never

known her suffer that way, and it was more likely that it was part of some plan for communicating with me.

Some five hours later, when, after another strained evening, spent for the sake of appearance in the hotel billiard-room, Herzog and I retired to our respective bedrooms, I proved the truth of the surmise. I had not begun to undress, and was listening to Herzog moving about in the next room, when a folded sheet of foolscap was gently slid under my door. Needless to say how I pounced upon the missive, and yet how carefully I handled it lest the crackling of the paper should reach the ears of my sleepless neighbor.

"I had to deceive father with a fictitious ailment in order to be by myself to write this," the document began abruptly in Janet's well-known hand. "I had better say at once, to prevent raising unfounded hopes, that I have discovered nothing to corroborate my suggested reading of your sister's last words. I have not heard the name of *Marske* all day. At the same time I *did* discover something which, I think, calls for further investigation.

"On presenting myself at 'The Glen,' I failed for some time to make any impression on the discreet elderly female who answered my ring. Sarah Leven is a woman of rare discrimination. I am very sure she is a treasure not often found nowadays in domestic service. She struck me as being in a very highly-strung condition—probably, though I did not at first refer to it, on account of your escape, of which she had doubtless heard. I rather think that she took me

for a police agent endeavoring to ascertain if you had sought refuge there.

"I began by describing myself as a stranger convinced of your innocence and desirous of seeing the house where such a miscarriage of justice had originated. But Sarah Leven, standing in the doorway, with her iron-grey locks framing her stern face, was not going to pander to idle curiosity. She commenced to shut the door upon me slowly.

" 'This house of death and sorrow is no place for sightseers,' she said, continuing to close the door till it touched the foot which I had thrust over the threshold. Still she did not desist, but pushed the door till my poor foot was squeezed almost to a jelly. I would not give way, and at last she cried angrily:

" 'If you do not go I will send the first passer-by for a policeman.'

" 'And rob Captain Rivington of his last chance of saving his honor and his life,' I answered, swiftly deciding that the only way to gain this faithful creature's confidence was to give her some of my own. And in pursuance of this idea I told her that I was your promised wife, and that I was set upon using the reprieve you had gained to find a clue to the wretch who should stand in your place. In fact, I told her everything—except that I had seen you and knew where you were. I even asked her if she knew the name of Marske in connection with your sister. She made no immediate reply, but I was gratified with the instant success of the course I had adopted. She opened the door and admitted me.

"Sarah Leven is evidently not a woman to do

things by halves. Having made up her mind that I was to be trusted, she was ready to trust me altogether. Leading the way into the dismantled drawing-room, she turned to me with all the grimness gone from her motherly face, and made amends in the quaintest old-fashioned way for her previous rudeness. I told her that I liked her the better for being rude to me before she was sure, and that clinched the matter. Sarah and I are sworn allies.

"She now answered in the negative the question I had put to her about the name of Marske. No such person had ever been at 'The Glen,' and she had never heard the name. Indeed, from what she says, your mother and sister must have led a most retiring life, seeing no one but the clergyman and a few neighbors, and never having visitors staying in the house —unless you yourself could be so considered.

"But you will be eager to learn the point which, rightly or wrongly, I regard as a discovery. It was this. Asked if your sister had a large postal correspondence, Sarah looked sharply at me, hesitated, and finally admitted such was the case.

" 'Ever since she went to stay in London for six months three years ago for the art classes, Miss Clara has written a lot of letters—received a good many, too, though not so many as she wrote,' Sarah Leven replied, and hesitated again, as if there was more behind.

" 'Come!' I persisted. 'I can see that Miss Rivington not only had many letters and wrote many, but that you know the name of her correspondent. Remember that whatever duty of silence and secrecy

you owed to her is cancelled by what you owe to her brother now. What you know may save him from a disgraceful death.'

"'It isn't much that I know, but I will tell it to you,' Sarah yielded after a pause. 'Miss Clara usually met the postman and got the letters from him, and she went to the post herself with those she wrote. But once, about a year ago, she had the influenza badly and could not leave the house. She asked me to post her letters for her and to say nothing about them to Mrs. Rivington. I didn't like it, having been with the mistress since a girl, but then, again, I loved Miss Clara as if she had been my own. I consented to post the letters, and I couldn't help seeing that they were to a gentleman.'

"'His name and address?' I asked, trying to conceal the importance I attached to the question.

"'Danvers Crane, care of Mrs. Webley, 450 High Street, Notting Hill,' Sarah replied, snapping her jaws as though she said it under compulsion, and, I hope, salving her dear honest conscience thereby. That woman is sterling gold, Arthur, and if ever these clouds break we must not forget her.

"Well, that is the sum total of my discovery, and now for my plans. I shall tell my father in the morning that I must go to London for two days—possibly three. Luckily I have an excuse in having to view a house which he thinks of taking near Harrow. But the house will not claim much of my time, which shall be devoted, to the last minute if necessary, to learning all there is to learn about Mr. Danvers Crane. I hope to get away by mid-day to-

morrow, and half-an-hour after I arrive in town I shall be making inquiries of Mrs. Webley at Notting Hill.

"I hate having to leave you, my own dearest, especially as you will be in the society of that hateful Herzog, and he may begin to urge on the unspeakable deed before I return. But I have no other clue to follow, and I am impelled by some undefined force to drag aside the veil from the man who had a part in your sister's life without the knowledge of her friends. Hope on, Arthur darling, as I shall, while there is room for hoping, but if you are driven into a corner during my absence you might, as the very last resort, tell your story to Lady Muriel—provided you can see her alone. But only if threatened with detection and recapture, for Muriel is devoted to her father, and might feel it her duty to warn him that there is a plot against his life."

So ended the missive, which by its clear brave words told me at least that I should be craven to despair while their staunch writer bade me hope. It was indeed news to me that my sister Clara, the demure and self-contained, had carried on a clandestine correspondence with a mysterious "Danvers Crane."

CHAPTER XI

ENTER LORD ALPHINGTON

ON the following day, from my first meeting with him, I noticed a slight change in Herzog's demeanor. It was not that he relaxed his outward courtesy towards me, or showed any slackening of confidence, but that he was silent and preoccupied. He evinced no disposition to leave the house till after he had received a telegram, which he put carefully away in his pocket-book after perusing it twice. From the time he took over it I guessed that it was in cipher.

It was then eleven o'clock, and I had seen nothing of Janet, though once or twice when the door was opened I had heard her voice in the opposite sitting-room as she talked with her father. The mid-day boat, by which she presumably meant to start for Lymington, *en route* for London, would be at the pier at a quarter to one, and it was therefore with a thrill of anticipation that I heard Herzog unfold his programme for the day.

"My friend," he said, "in comparison with yesterday to-day should be a day of small things. We will laze about the green walk, haunt the pier, and watch

the steamboats, and"—this with a clenching of the thin lips that were in such strange contrast to his fleshy countenance—"prepare the outline of our campaign. Your quarry arrives to-day. Any moment I may unleash you."

"By what boat is Lord Alphington expected?" I asked.

"By the one reaching here at noon—the same that brought us," was the reply.

It would be the boat which on its return journey would take Janet on the first stage of her quest for Danvers Crane. A sentimental longing to see her off seized me, and to that end I hazarded the dissimulating suggestion:

"I have never seen the Prime Minister. I might recognize him from his pictures or I might not, and it would be well to make sure of him in the flesh as soon as possible. I want to get my job over and be off, for this suspense is killing me. Let us go down and meet the boat."

"A good notion. I can understand your eagerness," said Herzog drily.

So it was that when the steamer rounded the point at Cliff End we were on the pier to watch her approach. While she was still a long way off Herzog nudged my elbow and drew my attention to a tall figure in a light grey suit standing by the wheel, talking to the captain.

"That is Lord Alphington," he said, far too clever to drop his voice amid a crowd where a whisper would have been more noticeable than his perfectly natural indication of such a celebrity.

"Yes, that is Lord Alphington, and you can prepare to face what the newspapers call his eagle gaze, for in five minutes I shall introduce my rescuer to him," said a merry voice behind us. And, turning, we had to make our bows to Lady Muriel, who, with Roger Marske in attendance, had come to meet her father.

It was Herzog who constituted himself spokesman, and as he was a man who weighed every word, he puzzled me by his answer.

"If you will allow me the privilege of a responsible medical man, Lady Muriel," he said, "I should prefer to have that introduction postponed a little. My patient, Mr. Martin, is not feeling quite the thing this morning, and the excitement of such an honor might be too much for him."

As the *soi-disant* Doctor Barrables enunciated this fiction I caught Marske's eyes bent on me in a malignant gaze, in which, however, I thought I detected a trace of *fear*. But Lady Muriel's sympathetic concern for my health caused me to turn to her and murmur a few words of thanks while Herzog gently plucked at my sleeve and led me away.

"We must steer clear of them while that fellow is about," he whispered. "I thought I had drawn his sting yesterday, but mischief is writ large all over him. I confess myself puzzled."

If my neck had not been in jeopardy I really think that at this point I should have begun to enjoy the game. That my cunning bear-leader should be puzzled by anything that to my duller wits seemed fairly patent was amusing, and under happier circum-

stances I could have laughed aloud at his mystification. For Herzog, I thought, attributed Marske's uneasiness to a desire to thwart the Alphington plot, whereas I had good reason to believe that Marske's hostility was due to a very present sense of danger to *himself*.

With much churning of her paddle-wheels the steamer sidled up to the pier, and as soon as she was made fast, Lord Alphington stepped across the gangway. His advent had been noised abroad, and quite a little crowd of butterfly idlers had come down to witness his arrival, forming a semi-circle, into which Lady Muriel impulsively pushed her way to greet her father. When the Premier bent his imposing figure to kiss his daughter, some one raised a cheer, which was taken up with well-bred moderation as the distinguished party moved off.

I was watching them as they walked up the pier, Lady Muriel hanging on to her father's arm, and Roger Marske, whom Lord Alphington had warmly shaken by the hand, following a few paces behind, when I saw Janet pass the toll-gate and come quickly towards them. She was carrying a small handbag, and was evidently in haste to catch the steamer, for she merely waved her hand to Lady Muriel and bowed to Lord Alphington as she passed. Her way to the gangway brought her quite close to where Herzog and I were lounging, but she affected not to see us, and vanished on to the boat.

"It seems that we are to lose our charming fellow-lodger," said Herzog, removing his cigar to stare after her. That inscrutable stare of his. How I

wished that I could read that stony mask and learn whether there was more in his mildly interested tone than met the ear.

"I suppose they have changed their minds again, and Mrs. Krance will be tearing her hair," said I, growing, I flattered myself, an adept in subtlety. "Colonel Chilmark is probably looking after the luggage and will be along directly."

"No," replied Herzog shortly, and I fancied that there was a curious undertone in his voice. "The Colonel stays behind."

I was wondering what this meant—what sources of information he had tapped—when my attention was distracted by the sight of Roger Marske returning alone along the pier. The arrival of Janet had caused me to transfer my gaze to her from the Alphington party, and the Earl and his daughter had now disappeared through the barrier—presumably to walk up to "Ardmore." Why was Marske coming back, with scowling face and determined tread?

The question troubled Herzog, too, I was sure. It was denied to a man of his plethoric build to repress one outward and audible sign of agitation, and the deep breath he drew told me that he was interested, if not annoyed. We neither of us had long to wait for an answer, and the ugly significance of it pierced me like a poisoned arrow.

Keeping his eyes averted, Marske crossed the gangway and went on board the steamer. He was going to London, too, by the same train as Janet, and his decision to do so could only have been come to on learning her intention. On the spur of the moment

he must have excused himself to Lord Alphington and Lady Muriel and returned to catch the boat.

Though his action was another confirmation of my suspicions, it filled me with the gravest apprehensions on Janet's behalf. It had seemed like an outrage before to allow a young and inexperienced girl to go to London alone to do the work of a skilled detective. Only my desperate position and my inability to trust any one else had eased my conscience as to her mission. But that the man to whom, if our theory was correct, her quest would be a menace, should be in London while she was engaged upon it was intolerable. What could his object be but to thwart her by any means in his power? If indeed he was the slayer of my mother and sister, he was a human fiend who would not hesitate to cover crime with crime.

Heaven knows what an agony of doubt and fear I suffered as I realized the situation. I felt that I could not, must not, let Janet go alone. I would at least start with her, and on the boat trust to luck either to dissuade her from the journey, or devise some scheme for continuing it with her. I turned fiercely to Herzog, noting as I did so that his face wore its most saturnine aspect.

"I am going to be ill," I blurted out. "My nerves will stand the strain no longer. A trip on the sea might revive me. I will chuck the whole thing and give myself up if I may not go to Lymington and back on the steamer. It is your only chance of getting me to do what you want."

His eyes burned and scorched into mine, but sud-

denly their expression changed to a sardonic smile. An ominous sound fell upon our ears—the plashing of the steamer's paddles.

"With all the will in the world I could not grant your request. It comes too late," he said.

It was too true; the boat was in motion, and by the time I could have jumped for her would have been her own length away. Some idea of my half-formed intention may have entered my companion's mind, for his gently restraining hand fell on my arm.

"Come, my friend," he said. "A walk to the Needles and back will give you all the sea air you want, and you will be a good deal safer with me than with Mr. Roger Marske."

And he led me away along the pier, steering me through the chattering throng of summer visitors, and so up the chine to the green walk, whence we had a parting view of the steamer that bore all my hopes and fears. As she rounded Cliff End Point and disappeared I could have wept with rage.

"See here," said Herzog, as he pushed me roughly down on to a seat; "you wish to save your neck, don't you? Well, your behavior led me to think that you had forgotten that part of your anatomy."

"Why?" I asked sullenly.

"You wanted to go on the boat with Marske to pick a quarrel with him because he suspects your identity—perhaps, in your inborn ferocity, to strangle him or throw him overboard, eh?"

That motive would serve as well as another, I was about to say, but checked the words in good time I thought, seeing that I could not tell him the real one.

"You must draw your own inferences," I replied in the same sullen tone.

"Have no fear but that I shall do that," Herzog retorted drily, leaving me in doubt once more whether all my wrigglings and subterfuges were not thrown away upon this keen peruser of human documents. That he had not yet directly alluded to Janet was no proof that he had not divined my secret. On the contrary, it would be part and parcel of his duplicity to allow me to think that I had preserved that secret till he could pounce on it, tear it from me, and turn it to his own ends.

But during the walk which we took out and back across the heather-clad hills his mood was again that of the genial companion, and no word of his dread scheme passed his lips till we were back in our sitting room at "Springthorpe." A coroneted envelope, addressed to me as "Martin, Esq.," lay on the table. Herzog took it up, opened it as coolly as though it had borne his own name, and, after reading the contents, said quietly:

"An invitation for both of us to dine at 'Ardmore' to-morrow night. On behalf of her father, Lady Muriel is very pressing, you see. As you are getting restive you shall have your way, my friend. Before the entertainment is over you shall have your opportunity to lay his lordship's proud head in the dust."

JANET'S NARRATIVE

CHAPTER XII

IN THE LONDON EXPRESS

I HAVE been asked to set down here the experiences which I went through in those dark days after Arthur's almost miraculous appearance at Totland, when I was already mourning him as lost to me forever. I need not dwell on the shock it was to meet him suddenly, in the company of that terrible Herzog, on the green walk overlooking the sea amid a crowd of holiday-makers, or on what happened subsequently down to my departure in search of the mysterious Danvers Crane. Nor do I ask your pity for a girl trying to stand between a brave, true lover and a shameful death. *That* I know I shall have in any case. But what I do implore is your forgiveness for the stupid blunders that I made, and for the nearly fatal mistake of underrating my opponent's dangerous cunning.

When this crisis swooped upon me I had seen very little of what the world calls "life," most of my time

and care having been devoted to my dear, cross father in our small house at Bayswater till I met Arthur at a dance given by a mutual friend. Our acquaintance quickly ripened into a love that was all too soon clouded by the tragedy of his arrest and sentence, followed by days that were a waking nightmare, solaced only by Muriel Crawshay's tender sympathy. Without that I must have died, I think.

I mention this to show what a helpless, hopeless sort of person I was to start on such a quest, with every moment of value, and Arthur's life in the balance. While, hardly less in importance, was the vital necessity of proving Arthur's innocence so that Lord Alphington might be warned against the unknown enemies, of whom Herzog was the figurehead. In truth was I a broken reed to lean on, and I could only console myself that a broken reed was better than none at all.

I didn't have to wait till I reached London for the magnitude of my task to be brought home to me. Refreshed by the breezy trip across the Solent, I had accomplished the short train journey from Lymington to the busy junction at Brockenhurst without adventure, and having crossed from the branch to the main line platform, found that the London express was not due for ten minutes. I was standing before the bookstall, idly reading the contents bills, when, to my horror, a sneering voice whispered at my ear:

"Still interested in the escaped murderer, Miss Chilmark?"

Turning quickly, I was confronted by Roger Marske, whom I had seen at Totland, in the company

of Lord Alphington and Lady Muriel, walking away from the steamer in which I had crossed—the very man to whom my vague suspicions pointed. He must have come on board at the last moment, and have kept out of my way during the passage and on the landing-stage at Lymington. Why should he have acted on such sudden impulse? To pit his cunning against my feeble wits, and thwart the enterprise on which I had embarked? That was the only construction that my brain could put upon it, and it appalled while in some degree it cheered me. The correctness of my surmise would be presumptive evidence of his guilt.

"Escaped murderer!" I exclaimed, pretending not to take him seriously. "What should make you think I had such morbid interests, Mr. Marske?"

He laughed harshly. "The subtle art of deduction," he said. "Your friend, Lady Muriel, was keen on getting hold of the newspaper on the day I escorted her down from London to the Isle of Wight—the day after Rivington's escape—and she explained it by telling me that it was a vicarious interest, don't you know. A friend of hers was worrying about the fellow, and as you have been so much with her lately, I concluded it was you."

Thank God, not treachery, but only indiscretion, on dear Muriel's part. I could never have forgiven her if she had repeated the secret I had confided to her—in this quarter of all others.

"It is certainly not in the direction of an *escaped* murderer that my interest lies," I said, accepting his challenge in the emphasis I put on the important

adjective as I looked him full in the eyes. The moment the words had passed my lips I was conscious of their rashness, inasmuch as they would confirm his suspicion of my latent hostility. If this man was really at the other end of the thin skein I held I had most effectually put him on his guard.

But if that was the case, he at least showed no trace of it. There was no alarm in the smile with which he received my foolishly significant disclaimer, or in the slight shrug of his well-knit shoulders. Dismissing the subject with an airy wave of his hand, he asked if I was going to London, and, if so, for how long. The politeness of his words was belied by the insolence of his eyes, but feeling that I had gone too far already, I answered carelessly:

"Yes, I am going to London—to look at a house which my father is thinking of taking. But I hope to be back at Totland Bay in a day or two."

He caressed his black mustache thoughtfully, and, murmuring a few commonplaces about his pleasure at my speedy return, he raised his hat and moved away. A few minutes passed, and then the express from Bournemouth to London rolled in, its two great gilded Pullman coaches in the center.

I had a second-class ticket, and in an intuitive fear that Mr. Marske might annoy me on the journey if I gave him the chance, I entered a compartment in which there was but one vacant seat. Turning to close the door, I had reason to rejoice at my precaution. Roger Marske had been close at my heels, and the scowl on his fac was eloquent of his disappointment that the carriage was full.

When the train started I surveyed my fellow passengers in a vain attempt to divine whether I was to enjoy the security of their company for the whole of the journey. The majority of them belonged to the same party—father, mother, three daughters, and a schoolboy. But though it was easy to gather from their chatter that they were returning from a holiday at Bournemouth, they made no mention of their destination. If they should get out at Southampton or Basingstoke—the only two stoppages—there would be plenty of room for Mr. Marske. If the remaining three passengers got out too I should be alone with him, were he to assail the compartment again.

The train sped through the bosky glades of the New Forest, and, sure enough, at Southampton West the paterfamilias and his brood filed out, leaving me in fear that I was to be deserted except by two feeble old ladies. The one remaining passenger, wearing, as he did, a mercantile marine uniform, must certainly be booked for the great seaport. But, no; when Roger Marske leaped into the compartment just as the train began to glide from the station, the sailor was still sitting motionless in his corner, his head hidden by his newspaper. He would be available for protection, if protection should become necessary.

Roger Marske, after a brief glance at the old ladies and a longer scrutiny of the uniformed figure in the corner, carried off his invasion of the compartment with an impudent assumption of having been separated from me at Brockenhurst as much to my chagrin as his own.

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"So sorry, Miss Chilmark, but you saw that my defection was unavoidable—one of the mischances of railway traveling in this benighted country," he laughed as he took the seat opposite mine. "It is better than I had hoped, however. I was afraid that that happily-departed family battalion would deprive me of your society all the way to town."

Now there were two things I was for the moment dreading above all others—being left alone with this man in a train that only stopped at long intervals, and being followed by him when I left the terminus at Waterloo. Unless the two old ladies and the sailor all got out at Basingstoke, I was secure from the former source of uneasiness, and I therefore thought it wise to begin to prepare the ground for avoiding the second and greater evil. On arriving in London I wanted to go at once to the address in High Street, Notting Hill, where, according to Sarah Leven, the mysterious Danvers Crane had received Clara Rivington's letters, but it was vitally imperative that I should pursue that investigation without Roger Marske's knowledge. If the detestable persistence with which he had thrust his presence on me gave me the opportunity of throwing dust in his eyes I should not altogether regret his intrusion.

"As you are here I may as well make use of you," I said. "I came away in such a hurry that I had no time to look out my route. How does one get from Waterloo to the Harrow district?"

He appeared to weigh the question deeply, knitting his brows at the landscape fleeting past the windows.

"It depends to some extent on where you are going

to stay while you are in town," he replied after a pause. "You would wish to go there first, I presume, to leave your luggage?"

This was turning the tables on me at the start, for he asked the one piece of information which of all the vital points in my armor of defense, this one of all others I must conceal. I had intended to stay the night at the house of an old servant who had set up a lodging-house in Bloomsbury, but I would not tell him that. My refuge must be kept sacred at the cost of prevarication, if not of a downright lie. Surely my cause—the cause of Arthur's safety—justified deceit.

Inspired with a sudden idea, which would enable me to blend truth with the requisite amount of mendacity, I replied: "I thought of going to the Great Western Hotel at Paddington Station, but I have not finally decided. That would be handy for Harrow, would it not?"

He showed his white teeth in an enigmatic smile. "Most convenient," he said, eyeing me in the same strange manner. "In that case all you have to do is to drive from Waterloo to your hotel, and then go on to your destination by the District Railway from Praed Street."

I thanked him as artlessly as I could, and changed the subject to harmless topics, not at all confident that I had deceived him as to the motive for my journey, and all the while oppressed with a sense that he was *waiting*. Waiting for what? To murder me if I was left alone with him at Basingstoke? If he was in truth the subject of poor Clara Rivington's cabalistic

words, there would be nothing preposterous in my apprehensions.

The clacking wheels formed a fitting accompaniment to the aimless chatter with which I tried to cover my suspense, and then, all too soon, there was a break in the rhythmical clang, and I knew that steam was being shut off for the stop at Basingstoke. Almost at the same moment, after the manner of their kind, the two old ladies showed signs of agitation. They jumped up and began to collect their possessions from the rack, leaving no doubt that they were about to quit the train. But the mercantile marine officer sat motionless in his corner, and the paper which had obscured his features, having dropped to his knees, he was revealed as fast asleep.

As soon as the train drew up at the platform the old ladies descended, but the sailor sat still, breathing with the regularity of sound slumber. Five minutes were allowed for refreshments, and I hoped against hope that Mr. Marske would go to the buffet, and so enable me, without need for excuse, to fly to another carriage. But he retained his seat, staring blankly at the bustle on the platform till four out of the five minutes were gone and carriage doors began to slam. Then he leaned over and tapped the sleeping man on the knee.

"Pardon me, sir," he said as the sailor awoke with a start. "It struck me that the attractions of the drowsy god might be causing you to pass your destination. This is Basingstoke."

The sleeper sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Basingstoke!" he cried with a stifled oath. "My ship sails

at five this afternoon, and I ought to have got out at Southampton."

"Your uniform half led me to fear that that might be the case," said Roger Marske politely, as the other bundled out of the compartment, leaving me face to face with the prospect of traveling a hundred miles alone in the company of the man I already hated, and was now beginning to fear.

A queer kind of magnetism compelled my gaze to meet his, and something I saw there intensified that vague fear into a sickly sensation of positive dread. The feeling overmastered me and would not be denied. I was slightly nearer to the door than he was, and using that advantage I took him by surprise and sprang out without a word of explanation. A moment later I was paying the excess fare to the conductor of the Pullman drawing-room car, and, as the train started, I took my seat amid the populous security of that luxurious vehicle.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. WEBLEY'S FICKLENESS

WHEN I left the train at Waterloo, though I kept my eyes sharply about me, I saw nothing of Roger Marske, and I proceeded to put into practise the plan which I had conceived for obliterating my tracks, if, as was probable, he should follow me.

Selecting a hansom with a speedy-looking horse and a keen-faced driver, I bade the man take me to the Great Western Hotel at Paddington. When we were clear of the string of other cabs descending the station incline into the Waterloo Road, I raised the flap and asked the driver to take particular notice whether we were being followed.

"Who'll be following you—a gentleman or a lady?" asked the man, looking me over curiously, and a little suspiciously, I thought, as he peered down from his perch.

"A gentleman—in a light gray frock coat and a Panama straw hat," I replied. "If he is following me at all he will probably be in another hansom."

"Right you are, miss. I'll give you the office if I see him," and down came the flap.

Across the bridge and along the Strand and Piccadilly the traffic was so dense that I did not expect any communication from my Jehu. He would be fully occupied in steering his own cab, nor in the press of vehicles behind would he be able to single out one containing a fare like my description. But when he had turned up Park Lane and traversed about half of that street the flap was again raised.

"I reckon I've spotted your toff, miss. He ain't in a keb—leastways not in a 'orse keb. He's in one of those blamed private tick-tacks, with a shover in livery," was my driver's announcement.

That Mr. Marske should have wired for his own motor car to meet him was more than likely. He belonged to the class that possesses such luxuries.

A little later the flap was raised once more. "He's overhauling us fast, miss. Seems as though he was going to run past us," was the latest report.

And then I remembered, what in the turmoil pressing on my poor brain I had forgotten—that Sir Gideon Marske, Roger Marske's father, lived in one of the smaller residences in the aristocratic thoroughfare through which we were passing. There was the chance that he might not be following me after all, but merely be going to his father's town house.

And sure enough, even as the thought occurred, a smart private motor cab flashed by us and drew to the curb opposite a house a little ahead. Roger Marske leaped out and stood parleying with the chauffeur, apparently sublimely unconscious that I was sitting back in my hansom lest he should see me. But so absorbed did he seem in the instructions he was giving

to his servant that his eyes never once strayed my way, and my cab passed—to be checked almost immediately by a lumbering railway van in front. The delay was little more than momentary, but I chafed at it while it lasted, and I could have sung for joy when my driver found an outlet and, whipping up his horse, forged ahead of the obstruction. In answer to my hurried question whether the motor cab had started on again in pursuit, he gave an emphatic denial.

"The machine's waiting, and the gent's gone into the house," he said, and banged down the flap.

I breathed a sigh of relief, and was more than half tempted so far to relax precautions as to alter my directions to the cabman, and order him to drive straight to Mrs. Webley's address in Notting Hill. So much depended, however, on my keeping that visit secret, that I decided to carry out my original design for hiding my tracks. This was the simple and, as I flattered myself, ingenious one of entering the Great Western Hotel from the street and walking out by the back way leading into the terminus. I had stayed in the hotel with my father, and knew my way about the building, and as I had brought nothing but a handbag I should be hampered by no considerations as to luggage.

Having paid the cabman liberally, little thinking that he had sold me like a sheep in that brief interval during our stoppage by the van, I put my scheme into execution. Making an excuse to the hall-porter that I was going to the coffee-room for refreshments before going on by train, I hastened through the corridors,

and so down the stairs giving access to Paddington Station. Going round to the arrival platform, I was quickly ensconced in another cab, having, I fondly believed, given my possible pursuer the slip.

At the corner of High Street, Notting Hill, I dismissed this second cab and set out on foot to find Number 420. I had to walk a considerable distance before I came to it, and then, just as I had expected, it proved to be a small newsvendor's shop, with the legend displayed in the window:

Letters can be Called for or Forwarded.
Fee One Penny.

First ascertaining that the name of Webley was still over the door, I crossed the dingy threshold into an atmosphere charged with the pungent smell of printers' ink. A stout woman, who had been knitting behind the diminutive counter, rose at my entrance—rose greedily, I thought, as though eager for custom. To ingratiate myself with her I bought a sixpenny magazine and half-a-dozen penny periodicals, and while completing the transaction I took stock of the vendor.

It is not too much to say that I was unfavorably impressed by Mrs. Webley's appearance, and still more so by her manner. Casually glanced at she might have been set down as a rather stupid, good-natured mountain of female flesh, but when she was analyzed more closely the impression faded, and you became aware that it was solely due to her liberal contour of face and form. The eyes, set very near

together, as if resenting the intervention of the bulky nose, were small and red-rimmed, and though expressionless by reason of never looking at you, on close inspection shifted hither and thither like those of a weasel. All the time Mrs. Webley's fat fingers were pouncing on the papers I indicated, her eyes were doing double duty, darting from about the level of my chin to the necessary piles of literature, but never rising to meet my gaze.

Not an engaging personality from whom to seek assistance in a matter of life and death, nor a particularly trustworthy one. Yet I had to take the plunge.

"You receive letters here," I said, counting out some small change in payment for my purchases. "Do you keep a register of those that are called for or forwarded?"

The woman raked in my money and dropped it coin by coin into the till before answering.

"I suppose that's why you spent a shilling," she said slowly; "to find that out. No, I don't keep a register; and there's something else I don't do. I don't give my customers away."

Her eyes managed to get to the level of my nose this time, and then sank swiftly in an evident attempt to appraise the well-worn but servicable coat and skirt I was wearing. I saw her meaning. She thought I meant to have letters addressed there, and she was gauging my probable value to her from the blackmailer's point of view. I should have been sorry for any correspondence of mine to pass through that harpy's hands.

Ignoring her profession of probity, I put another

question: "Can you give me the present address of a Mr. Danvers Crane, who used to have his letters sent here about two years ago?"

The response was a blank shake of the head, accompanied by the resumption of her seat and her knitting.

"Come," I persisted. "I am willing to give you a sovereign for the information, and I will promise not to tell the gentleman where I obtained it."

I remembered within the next few days that when I made the offer she looked up quickly, but that her eyes, missing mine as usual, wandered past me to the shop window. When she withdrew them after the lapse of a minute and focused them as nearly as was possible to her on my face, her manner had undergone a complete change.

"Now you are talking business," she said briskly. "If you will come back in half an hour I dare say I shall have discovered what you want."

Having had nothing to eat since my early lunch at Totland before joining the boat, I spent the interval partaking of some tea and toast well made and served at a confectioner's, and on presenting myself at Mrs. Webley's again I found her still in a complacent mood.

"Here is the address, though I don't know whether the gentleman lives there still," she said, handing me a slip of paper in exchange for the sovereign which I tendered so eagerly.

"Can you describe him?" I asked, pausing in the doorway.

But without looking up, Mrs. Webley muttered to her knitting that she could not do that, as she had

never seen the gentleman. He had always had his letters forwarded by post.

I was out in the street in a moment, for I could not trust myself to read in that forbidding presence. Scrawled in pencil, this was what met my feverish scrutiny:

"Danvers Crane, Esq., The Mill House, Chipping Wyvern, Essex."

CHAPTER XIV

IN PERIL BY DAY

MY first sensation on perusing Mrs. Webley's villainous handwriting was one of disappointment. I had hoped that, though she had received the letters addressed to "Danvers Crane," they had been forwarded by her to Roger Marske, in which case I should indeed have gone far toward establishing my solution of Clara Rivington's last utterance.

That that utterance was meant in some way to indicate her murderer I had not the shadow of a doubt, but unless I could trace some connection between her and Roger Marske my reading of the cryptogram was useless for the purpose of clearing Arthur. My lover's sister might have been in correspondence with twenty "Danvers Cranes" without that shedding any light on her mysterious accusation. The poor girl had said nothing about Danvers Crane. Her words had been *"Man, mask, Roger."*

Still, there was of course the possibility that Roger Marske might be at the other end of the clue in spite of this. To a scheming scoundrel, bent on concealing his identity, a dual use of a false name would have been as easy as a single one. Though why, as Clara Rivington, according to my theory, must have known

his real name, there should have been need for concealment in his dealings with Mrs. Webley was beyond my fathoming, and for the present I would not attempt a solution. I would go on, along the only road that had opened to me, on the chance of finding Roger Marske at the end of it. I had lost count of time in the whirl that had encircled me since my arrival at Waterloo, but now I glanced at my watch and saw that it was nearly seven o'clock. It was too late, with all the will in the world, to think of going down to Essex that day to an unknown destination, which might be miles from the nearest station, and loth as I was to lose any time in the furtherance of my task, I sought an asylum for the night with our old cook in her Bloomsbury lodging-house. That I received a warm welcome, and lay awake till the small hours thinking of Arthur in his terrible predicament in the company of that hateful Herzog, are mere details which I have no space to dwell upon.

I was up betimes in the morning, and, having looked out my route on the previous evening, caught an early train at Liverpool Street for Brentwood. There I ascertained by inquiry at the station that Chipping Wyvern was a mere hamlet three miles away in the heart of the country. As it was a lovely summer day, and I wished to be free to make inquiries before going to the Mill House, I obtained directions from a friendly porter, and set off to walk the distance at my best pace.

For a mile beyond the outskirts of the town I followed the high road, but then I crossed a stile to avail myself of a short cut that had been described to me.

Thence onward the path led through waving cornfields and lush-green meadows till I found myself looking down into a valley through which wound a tree-girt stream.

Immediately below me lay a cluster of cottages, which I recognized from the description as Chipping Wyvern, but they were some little way from the stream, nor was there any house among them where a gentleman would be likely to reside or even to lodge. Shifting my gaze to the left, however, I discerned the peaked gables of a roof rising over the poplars half a mile from the hamlet. A glint of silver among the trees showed that the building stood on the bank, and was probably the Mill House.

Descending the hillside, I struck a lane which brought me to the cottages, and an inquiry at the first one I came to proved the truth of my conjecture.

"I do hope you're going to take the Mill House, miss," said the honest countrywoman who gave me the information. "We want some gentlefolks in it again to buy our eggs and poultry. There's been no one living in it since four years come Christmas."

"Four years!" I exclaimed in astonishment. That put the clock back to two years before Clara Rivington had been posting letters to Mrs. Webley's to be forwarded to Danvers Crane. It was inconceivable that they should have been sent to an empty house.

"Yes, there's been no tenant in the Mill House all that while," the woman proceeded as if it were a personal grievance. "The last was Sir Charles Darlington, who took it while he had the Abbey Farm shooting one season."

"Then it isn't furnished?" I asked.

No, there was nothing in the house, my informant said, and had not been since the few things Sir Charles had hired in Brentwood had been removed at the end of his tenancy, and she did not believe that it was so much as locked up. If I wanted to look over it I should probably be able to walk right in.

Thanking the woman, I continued my way along the lane, determined, having come so far, to explore the address given me by Mrs. Webley. I could not believe that that eminently business-like female, used as she was to the forwarding of letters, could have made a mistake, though why she should have purposely sent me on a wild-goose chase was another shaft from the quiver of mystery-tipped arrows which Fate seemed to be aiming at me. And how, I asked myself, supposing that Mrs. Webley desired to mislead me, came she to have the name of a long unoccupied house so pat to her requirements?

No sense of personal danger to myself occurred as I tried to solve the question while walking along the lonely lane. All my indignation, if I had been sent on a fool's errand, would be for the hindrance it would be to Arthur's cause, but I do not think I should have turned back could I have foreseen what awaited me in the desolate building that now loomed through the trees ahead. For then I should have known that the errand might be that of a fool, but that it led me far in the direction I wanted to go.

When I reached the palings separating the premises from the road I saw that they consisted of two portions—an ancient mill with granaries and store-rooms

attached, and a dwelling-house that had formerly been the residence of the miller. The latter part of the rambling pile was externally in a fair state of repair, but the mill had been allowed to fall into the last stages of decay. Of the motionless, weed-grown wheel but a few rotting blades remained, the others having dropped one by one, during half a century of disuse, into the turbulent mill-race, whose waters sagged and gurgled amid the slimy masonry.

Making my way along the neglected path through the wilderness of a garden, I tried the front door, and, as I had been led to expect, found it unfastened. The sudden change from the sunlight of the June day to the gloom of the dark passage blinded me for the moment, but, wishing to be undisturbed, and knowing that I should soon get accustomed to the chastened light, I closed the door behind me and walked at haphazard into a room on the left. Save for the mouldy blind that veiled the window there was nothing to be seen but the bare walls.

Returning to the passage, I went on to the room behind on the same side, and I had no sooner opened the door and stepped in than I experienced two surprises in quick succession. The window in this apartment was not only uncovered by a blind, but it was wide open, and, leading to it in a straight track across the dusty floor, there were the prints of a man's boots. I had hardly begun to ask myself what this meant, when, without any preliminary sound to warn me, the room door was shut on me and the key was turned in the lock.

Rushing to the window, I only needed a glance to

tell me that I was a prisoner. Swift and silent, flowing with the strength of great depth toward the race, the mill-stream actually washed the walls of the house, cutting off all retreat.

I ran back to make a frantic but vain attack on the locked door, and as my puny blows fell on the age-blackened panels I distinctly heard a receding foot-fall, soft and cat-like, in the passage outside.

Was my unseen captor going away without a word, leaving me with the alternatives whether to starve or drown?

CHAPTER XV

IN PERIL BY NIGHT

TO say that I was alarmed by the sudden swoop upon me of an unseen enemy at the Mill House at Chipping Wyvern would fall very short of describing my first sensations. I am no heroine, and I have no desire to pose as one, but I was really more angry than frightened for myself in the minutes that succeeded my entrapment.

The mere fact of my having been entrapped showed that I had been recognized by some one as a dangerous adversary, and that some one could be no other than Roger Marske. I had already reason to believe that he suspected me of espousing Arthur's cause, and though I had thought that I had shaken off his pursuit, the state of his conscience, if guilty, would account for his appearance on the scene to which my investigations would lead me. Yet if this was so, the woman at the cottage must have been wrong in saying that the Mill House had been so long unoccupied, and Marske must have resided there, or had his letters sent there, at a much later date than she had mentioned.

The logical conclusion that I had successfully established a connection between Roger Marske and Clara

Rivington filled me with an elation which only wore off when I saw how impotent I was to make use of it. I should be just as dangerous to my captor a year hence as to-day. My temporary detention would yield him no security, and, lonely as was the situation of the old house, he could not hope to keep me prisoner there forever. He must have followed or preceded me thither with the fell design of silencing me once for all, and I was not intended to leave the place alive.

I went back to the window in the hope that a closer examination of my surroundings would reveal some means of escape overlooked in my first alarm. But no; the strong current of the mill-stream surged beneath me, the walls of the house seeming to rise from the very brink of the natural bank. There was not foothold for a mouse between the damp brick-work and the fast-flowing flood, which would have carried any but the strongest swimmer into the mill-race long before the opposite bank, forty feet away, could be reached. For me even the attempt was hopeless, for I could not swim at all.

I turned my attention next to the more distant prospect from the window, without meeting any encouragement there. From the opposite bank the ground rose quickly, limiting my horizon to a hedge which formed the sky-line two hundreds yards up the hillside, and as the field was covered with growing corn, scarcely yellowed as yet, no one to whom I could appeal for assistance was likely to come within hearing. A month later the harvesters would be busy there, but where then should I be?

On the chance that there might be another window parallel with that at which I stood, and to which at the risk of drowning I could swing myself, and so reach an unlocked room, I leaned out and scanned the wall to the right of me. Yes, there was a window —I could see its projecting sill—but it was so far away as to preclude all idea of reaching it in safety.

I turned to the other side, and here, though there was no window at all between me and the tumble-down annex that had contained the machinery over the water-wheel, my despairing scrutiny was arrested by an object within touch of my hand. It was a metal rain pipe, running down from the eaves into the stream, and, as a forlorn hope, might be used as a means for climbing to an upper window or to the roof.

I was just twisting my body, so as to gaze upwards along the course of the pipe, when a rushing wind seemed to pass close to my face, and simultaneously two sounds, the lesser almost drowned by the greater, caused me to jump back into the room. The one was the splash of a bullet as it plunged into the mill-stream below, the other was the report of a pistol fired from the window immediately over me.

Some one, with murderous intent, had shot at me from the room above. The rustic hamlet of Chipping Wyvern did not seem such a harmless place as when I had first looked down into the picturesque valley an hour ago, I told myself hysterically, as I leaned against the wall trying to save myself from fainting with fear of that invisible foe upstairs.

The shock lasted longer than I liked, and when it

passed I knew for the first time in my life the meaning of the word "nerves." I am ashamed to say that for a little while the dread of present circumstances overmastered the greater tragedy of my lover's dire peril, and the tremendous issues of which, apart from his own danger, he was the focus. That I was only a girl, shut up in a solitary house, uninhabited except by myself and a ruthless assassin bent on taking my life, must be counted to me as an excuse. For five minutes I had no ears but for possible sounds in the room overhead, no eyes but for the smiling cornfield opposite the window.

But as I slowly recovered my scattered senses, and with them my scanty stock of courage, I remembered the trifling importance of my own danger compared with the results dependent on my safety. If that stealthy, lurking adversary succeeded in taking my life, not only would Arthur be a doomed man, but on his final repudiation of it some less scrupulous tool would be found for carrying out the murderous plot against the Prime Minister. The thought appalled me—that my slender chance of escape was all that stood to avert a great national calamity.

Not that I needed any such incitement to make me strain every sense to ensure self-preservation. My Arthur's liberty and good name demanded it, the more so that my assailant's desperate endeavor to silence me pointed to the guilt of the man with whom Arthur's sister had corresponded through the medium of the Notting Hill newsvendor. Actual proof, indeed, I had not yet obtained, even as to the identity of "Danvers Crane," but that would be furnished by

the first glance I got of the man who had shot at me from the upper window.

But how was I to free myself, and in such manner that in gaining freedom I gained also a sight of my enemy? The thing seemed impossible. The room door was of massive oak, but had it been the flimsiest jerry-builder's article there was not a single piece of furniture to use as a battering-ram. On the other hand, the mill-stream presented an impassable barrier, to say nothing of the certainty that I should be fired upon again if I so much as put my head out of the window. For one wild moment I thought of the chimney, but inspection showed it to be impracticable.

On one point only could I congratulate myself—that if I could not get away, neither, unless he had a boat, of which there was no sign, could my would-be slayer get at me. The stream, while it was my obstacle, was also my safeguard on one side, and on the other a pair of stout bolts kept him out. Perceiving them when the door had first been shut on me, I had promptly shot them home in their sockets.

On my remembering that first thrill of discovery that I was not alone in the house, the question occurred: why had not the wretch killed me when he stole to the door to close and lock it? I had been within a few feet of him then, with my back to the door. The answer, to my mind, seemed a simple one, and confirmatory of my suspicions. He had not used his pistol on me then because, with all the chances in his favor, there was yet the one chance of his missing me—a risk he dared not run, *because if I saw him I should recognize him.* If he had missed me and I had

leaped through the window into the river there would have been the remote possibility of my survival, and my survival under those circumstances would have meant his ruin.

I was convinced that his present intention was to kill me without giving me the opportunity of seeing him, and unless he grew reckless after his initial failure, I might die in ignorance of my murderer's name. That he had passed under that of "Danvers Crane" was morally certain, that his real name was Roger Marske was more than likely, but I could not know these things as knowledge is counted in a court of law. A hostile barrister would have called such knowledge as I possessed mere guess work and surmise.

The minutes passed slowly, and still not a sound came from overhead or from the interior of the house. Outside in the sunshine, over the waving corn, the larks were singing merrily, insects hummed in the lazy air, and the cool gurgle of water came from the piles of the old mill. But inside that grim abode all was silence—the kind of silence that is too quiet for peace of mind when you know that under the same roof there is some one who wishes you dead.

The minutes grew into hours, and the lengthening shadows of evening found me still standing in the bare, unfurnished room, listening for sounds that never came. I began to wonder whether Mr. "Danvers Crane" had fallen back on slow starvation as a better weapon than his pistol, and I was glad that for a little while I could thwart that amiable intention, thanks to a packet of sandwiches that I had brought. It is true that I was very thirsty, and I

would have given every coin in my purse for a cup of tea, but there was relief in the thought that he might have gone away and left his murderous work to "natural causes." Mother Nature in her sternest mood was like to be kinder than such as he.

And then, when the birds had ceased to sing and the shadows had deepened into twilight, I was made suddenly aware that I was not alone in the Mill House after all—that the invisible one had not gone away, but was horribly, cruelly active. The first sign I had of his presence was a sort of "swishing" noise in the passage close to the door, ceasing as suddenly as it began. I was wondering if my ears had deceived me, when it came again after a few minutes' interval, and so keenly were my nerves attuned now to danger that I could as good as see what was going on at the other side of the door. Some one was piling up straw and brushwood, with a view to setting fire to the house.

This conjured-up horror became terrible reality almost as soon as I pictured the invisible fiend at his ruthless work. A faint crackle reached my straining ears—a crackle that with every fleeting second grew in volume, till smoke, pouring through the crevices of the door, left no doubt of the fate awaiting me if I remained five minutes longer in the doomed chamber.

But even at that awful moment a triumph compensated me in some measure for the ordeal I was undergoing—the triumph so dear to a woman's heart, which, in happier circumstances, she phrases in the well-worn commonplace: "I told you so."

Above the hiss and roar of the now raging flames a man shouted from further down the passage: "Good-bye, Miss Chilmark! The choice is with you —fire or water. So much for uncalled-for interference."

That vindictive speech was my justification, for the voice was the voice of Roger Marske, and I knew that I had rightly solved the meaning of Clara Rivington's last utterance.

I made no answer, and the sound of his steps receding quickly, followed by the slamming of the front door, told me that he had fled from the scene of his crime.

CHAPTER XVI

A PEACE MAGISTRATE

BUT my triumph would be a barren one indeed if I stood there till the devouring flames broke in upon me, and in my extremity I turned to my last resource, the waste-water pipe running down past the window. If I could gain the room above there would be no risk of meeting Roger Marske there now, and I might be able to escape through the house before it was fully alight.

With my penknife I cut the cord from the window blind, and, reaching from the window, made a loose slip-knot round the pipe. The other end I fastened to my wrist to give me confidence in my climb. Then, with an unspoken prayer, I clambered out on to the sill, and, not daring to look down at the dark waters below, I swung from my foothold to the frail support of the metal tube. It rattled and swayed ominously under the grasp of my fingers and the clutch of my knees, and every instant I feared that it would drag the holdfasts from the decayed mortar, carrying me with it into the oily flood beneath. But I kept on and upward, thankful that girls have muscles nowadays, and at last I flung myself through the luckily

open window of the room from which Marske had tried to shoot me.

The room was full of smoke, warning me, as did the roar of flames in the lower part of the house, not to try to recover my breath till I was clear of the burning building. Rushing through on to the landing, I found the front stairs burning fiercely, but I discovered a second staircase, little better than a ladder, which brought me to a kitchen, whence an unlocked door gave on to a yard. Hardly knowing how I got there, I eventually staggered out into the lane, just as the flames licked through the front windows, and the Mill House from foundation to roof was illumined in a lurid glow.

I had no apprehension that Roger Marske would be lurking near the scene of his villainy, but the glare in the sky would assuredly bring some of the nearest dwellers upon the spot before long, and I had no desire to be detained and questioned then. The burning of the Mill House and the attempt on my life were minor details of the far graver accusation which I believed myself to be now in a position to bring against Roger Marske, and I wished to lose not a moment in doing so. Arthur's salvation, I was convinced, depended on my striking at the real criminal before the latter learned of my escape, and to achieve that end I must make myself scarce before the arrival of spectators.

These would come from the hamlet of Chipping Wyvern, through which I had passed in the morning, and as I should probably be recognized as the person who had inquired for the Mill House, I set off in the

opposite direction. It was nearly dark, my watch telling me that it was just nine o'clock.

Stumbling along the stony lane, I tried to formulate my plans, and here my inexperience, fortified by impatience for my lover's safety, led me into a grave error of judgment. I had reached a point in my investigation where I should have obtained trustworthy counsel from some barrister who could give practical advice. The wisest course would have been to take train for London and confide all that happened to the solicitor who had defended Arthur at the trial. Instead of that, I hesitated between going straight to the police and laying an information with a magistrate.

After walking for over a mile, the lane brought me into a broad high road, and here, after another quarter of an hour's tramp, chance took a hand in settling the vexed question for me. I came to the lodge gates of what was evidently a large mansion, and as a light streamed from the open door of the lodge I stopped to ask my way to Brentwood.

"A matter of four miles yonder," replied an old man from the chimney corner, indicating the direction from which I had come.

So I had got to trudge four weary miles before I could disclose to official ears the tremendous secret I was carrying. I had worked myself up to think that when the authorities heard my story, a mere stroke of the pen, or some equally facile method, would reinstate Arthur and put Roger Marske in his place. It was galling to have to wait an hour before utilizing my experiences, and, the second alternative occurring to

me, I asked: "Can you tell me where the nearest magistrate lives?"

The old lodgekeeper blinked at me queerly as he replied: "You'll be a stranger, then, I reckon. Ivery one knows as the master be Cheerman. Not a common five shillings the week beak, but Cheerman o' Quarter Sessions," he added proudly. And he pointed a palsied finger to the lights of the great house among the trees.

Thanking him for his information, I set off along the carriage drive, and it was not till I had traversed three parts of it and was leaving the park for the pleasure gardens that I remembered that I ought to have inquired his master's name. Not of real importance, perhaps, but useful in gaining admission. However, the latter necessity was not to arise. As I approached the portico I caught the scent of a cigar, and, glancing at the lawn in front of the mansion, saw the stooping figure of a tall man in evening dress shown up in the light that came from an open French window.

He must have been watching my arrival, for he came quickly forward with, I could not help thinking, an undue eagerness for such a magnate as his retainer had described him. But the next moment, in a high-pitched, authoritative voice, he gave a simple explanation for his curiosity.

"You are the young woman from the post-office, and have a telegram for me, eh?" he inquired as he stepped from the grass onto the gravel. And he held out his hand for the non-existent message.

"No," I answered; "I do not come from the post-

office. I was given to understand at the lodge that you are a magistrate, and I want to speak to you on most important business—swear an information, I think it is called."

An exclamation that sounded like annoyance escaped him, but he atoned for it by a polite gesture toward the open French window. I could only see him indistinctly in the blend of dying daylight and a rising moon, yet I gathered an impression of capability, and the custom of command, tempered by age.

"If you will be so good as to step in here," he said, leading the way, "we shall save the servants the trouble of answering the door. This is my justice-room, but I also use it for smoking purposes after dinner."

In the gloom of the garden I had taken him for a country gentleman, disappointed that I was not the bearer of a telegram announcing the result of some race in which he was interested. Here, in the shaded lamplight of the luxurious apartment, I at once recognized my mistake. He to whom I was about to impart my accusation against Roger Marske was no sportsman in the usual acceptance of the term. He was an old man with a sallow, unwholesome complexion, suggestive of late hours and life in cities, his burning eyes under the cavernous brows alone having defied physical decay.

These he fixed upon me in a searching gaze as he seated himself at a great pedestal table, and I at once remembered what till now in my excitement I had forgotten—that my appearance after the climb up the stack-pipe could be none of the tidiest.

"You look as if you had met with ill-treatment. You wish to prefer a charge of assault?" he inquired sharply, taking up a pen and drawing paper toward him.

"I wish to prefer a charge of murder, and also of attempted murder, against one Roger Marske," I answered him eagerly.

Slowly, very slowly, he replaced the pen in the tray, and, joining the tips of his fingers, bent his chin to them as he surveyed me with a perfectly sphinx-like countenance. The scrutiny lasted a full minute.

"Of murdering, and of attempting to murder whom, do you accuse—this person?" he inquired presently, in a tone that sounded unpromising. It was not altogether incredulous, but there was a hostile ring in it that jarred, I knew not why. In putting the question he worked his face in a curious contortion that was hardly a smile, and I saw that his few remaining teeth were sharp and yellow, like an aged dog's fangs.

"I accuse him of murdering a young lady named Clara Rivington and her mother," I replied, ignoring the second and less material half of his question for the present. "The matter is urgent, because a perfectly innocent man has been convicted of the crime, and will be—will be hanged if he is recaptured," I added, nearly breaking down.

"Recaptured! The convict's name?" demanded the magistrate in his high-pitched treble, shooting a glance at me that boded ill for my cause.

"Arthur Rivington—the prisoner who escaped from Winchester Jail. You must have heard of it," said I; and then a great fear seized me that he would

ask me if I had met or communicated with Arthur since his escape. I should have to lie if he did, for I could not confess to this strange-mannered, unsympathetic old man that I had seen my lover. For the same reason my lips were sealed about the plot against Lord Alphington, which alone I could have learned from Arthur. Doubtless my name and address would be taken; it would be known that I had come from Totland Bay, and if I told of my interview with Arthur he would be traced thither before his safety was assured. But I was not called upon to lie.

"Yes," replied my interrogator drily, "I have heard of the case. Now be so good as to lay your information against this other one, who, according to this extraordinary story of yours, ought to be in the convict's shoes."

So I took a step nearer to the table and poured out my story—how I had formed the theory that Clara Rivington's last words indicated the name of her murderer, how I had started out to trace the mysterious "Danvers Crane," and how the person whose name of Marske had inspired the idea had followed and lain in wait for me at the address which I had connected with "Danvers Crane."

The old man ran his delicate fingers through the scanty hairs on his forehead and regarded me with keen comprehension. "Then Roger Marske was at your point of departure on this extraordinary errand?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, seeing no harm in the admission. This country justice of the peace could not possibly be aware that Arthur was in the Isle of

Wight, I told myself, any more than he could have known of Roger Marske's presence there.

"And where did the chase end?" he went on. "Where did this strenuous villain, as you describe him, lie in wait for you?"

"At the Mill House at Chipping Wyvern, which is even now on fire through his attempt to burn me in it," I replied.

I had made an impression at last. The old man half rose from his chair, his lips twitching and his blue-veined fist clenched in a gesture of menace which it was impossible to account for. Could it be that he resented my having brought such an unsavory business so close to his own domain?

"The Mill House at Chipping Wyvern. Then where is——" he was beginning to shrill at me, when a tap at the door checked him. A footman in a plain but handsome livery entered, but paused irresolute on seeing me. His action was unusual for one of his class, yet when illumined by the message he bore seemed fully explained to me. With a gesture of impatience, such as he had shown when meeting me on the lawn, the magistrate spoke.

"Well, Sanders, what is it?" his master asked sharply.

"I beg pardon, Sir Gideon, but Mr. Roger has arrived from London and sent me to see if you were in your room," was the reply that set my knees trembling as they had never trembled before throughout that fateful day. In ignorance I had made an official confidant of the father of the man I came to charge. This was Sir Gideon Marske, the well-known Cabinet Min-

ister, and I did not need to look twice at him to see which side he was going to take.

"Inform Mr. Roger that I am here, and that I shall be obliged if he will step this way," he said to the footman, who bowed and retired.

ARTHUR RIVINGTON'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

CHAPTER XVII

THE TUBE OF ATROPINE

ON the morning after Janet's departure Herzog elected, in spite of a cloudless sky, to remain indoors, satisfying the curiosity of Mrs. Krance with the invented explanation that I was not very well, and must save myself up for the dinner at Lord Alphington's in the evening. His real reason for not going out was soon apparent in the receipt of several telegrams which arrived at short intervals, all of them demanding prompt replies.

So absorbed was he in this business that, without letting me out of his sight, he left me pretty much to my own devices. He had said nothing to me as yet about the means he intended me to employ for the assassination of the Prime Minister, and I was beginning to hope that for that night at least I should be reprieved from the ordeal of defying my evil genius. For all that, I was utterly miserable and dejected. The ill-omened and, I believed, unpremedi-

tated departure of Roger Marske by the same boat as Janet, had kept me tossing in anxiety for my brave girl till dawn, and now as the slow day wore on I could hardly contain myself.

I wondered if Colonel Chilmark, whose querulous tones in conversation with the landlady often reached me from the opposite sitting-room, had heard from his daughter. There would have been plenty of time for her to notify her safe arrival in London so as to reach her father by first post.

"This is deadly dull," I said, affecting a yawn toward luncheon time, when Herzog was hard at it translating one of his cipher telegrams. "Would there be any objection to my going and having a yarn with that old Colonel over the way? You can keep your eye on the front door, to see that I don't bolt."

My companion looked round from his occupation at the table in the window, squaring his broad shoulders to get a better view of me as I lounged against the mantelpiece. His eyes pierced like gimlets, but something of the sternness passed from them before he spoke.

"My friend," he said, "you are not in social mood; neither, I expect, is Colonel Chilmark, after being deserted by his charming daughter. It will be better for both of you if you remain where you are. Take comfort by the fact that I shall relieve your boredom by occupying your attention very fully after lunch."

I dared not press the matter, never knowing how far this human enigma had penetrated into my inmost soul. He turned to his work again, and having handed his reply-telegram to the waiting messenger,

smoked in silence till Mrs. Krance appeared with the luncheon tray.

The meal over, Herzog surprised me with the proposal that we should go out in a boat, my astonishment being greater when, after descending to the beach, he declined the services of the owner of the craft he hired.

"My friend will row me about, and as we shall not go far from the shore you need be under no apprehension for us or for your boat," he said to the boatman. "I am his doctor, and I prescribe the exercise for him."

Motioning me to take the oars, he sat in the stern, and when we had pushed off his explanation was forthcoming. "Walls and hedges have ears, and I have instructions to give which must not be overheard," he said in a low voice. "Keep away from the pier and avoid other boats while I school you to win your freedom."

Pulling clear of the youths and maidens in canoes, and threading a course through the yacht anchorage, I swung to the left and bore away to shelter under the shadow of the cliffs, where we were in comparative seclusion. Herzog, whose eyes and ears had been for surroundings, now concentrated his attention on me, and it must have occurred to him that it is difficult to study the physiognomy of a man rowing a broad-beamed wherry with a stout passenger in the stern.

"Let her drift a little, and look at this," he said.

He referred to a pill-box which he took from his waistcoat pocket, removing the lid and holding it

toward me. It was nearly full of cotton wool, on which lay a tiny tube of india-rubber. "Take it carefully, it is a very delicate contrivance," he added.

Holding the box in the palm of my hand, I saw that the tube was bulbed at one end, after the fashion of the "release" of the pneumatic shutter of a snapshot camera. The whole thing was very small, not more than half an inch long.

"Looks like a sort of squirt. What am I to do with it?" I asked, more than half guessing its deadly purpose.

"That tube contains, in solution, a grain of atropine, as you are probably aware, a most potent and instantaneous poison," Herzog replied, watching me intently. "When we are sitting over our wine with Lord Alphington to-night you will find or make an opportunity for squeezing it into his wine-glass. He will be a dead man in two minutes, and unless you bungle the operation no suspicion will rest on you till after the autopsy. You will be there, remember, as an honored guest, who three days ago saved Lady Muriel's life at the risk of your own."

"It sounds easy," I said, stifling my nausea with an effort, and pretending deep interest in the tube.

"It *is* easy; I have made it so intentionally, Rivington, because you must forgive me for saying that I miss something in you which your reputation had led me to expect—the power of initiation."

I forced a laugh, trying to make it cynical. "You are quite fatherly in your solicitude, but I do not think that you will find that I shall bungle the administration of his lordship's dose," I replied. And

then, well knowing that there would be no need for the information, but to deceive him, I added: "And where do I come in? What arrangements have you made for me to get away, which, after all, is the essence of our contract?"

"The safest and surest arrangements," he said. "We shall return to our lodgings, after the proper condolences; you will take the first train from Freshwater to Cowes in the morning, cross to Southampton, and be on board the Royal Mail steamer that sails for South American ports in the afternoon, with two hundred pounds in your pocket."

For answer I shut down the lid of the pill-box and placed it in my vest pocket. Then, resuming the oars on which I had rested, I pulled slowly toward the shore, hoping that the significance of my action had been misunderstood in the way I wished. I gained the impression that it had, for Herzog nodded his satisfaction and allowed me to retain the box.

It was still in my pocket when, some hours later, we quitted our lodgings and walked round to "Ardmore" in the gathering dusk to keep our dinner engagement. Under the lamp opposite the entrance gates Herzog plucked the sleeve of my dress coat and came to an abrupt halt.

"One moment—I want to look at that thing," he said.

Cold beads of perspiration broke out on my forehead, but I produced the box and stood with quaking knees while he examined the little syringe. The grunt with which he returned it told me nothing. It was one of the mystifying oddities of my guardian

sphinx. Most men give vent to a muttered ejaculation, an intonation betraying the hidden thought within, be it of approbation or disgust. But Herzog's real sentiments were beyond fathoming.

"Is it all right—in good working order?" I asked, feeling constrained to say something.

"Quite right," he answered, glancing at me curiously in the lamplight. "Come along, or we shall keep our noble host and hostess waiting."

CHAPTER XVIII

SLEIGHT OF HAND

WHEN Lord Alphington's butler announced us as "Mr. Martin and Doctor Barrables" at the drawing-room door, and Lady Muriel and the greatest servant of the King came forward to welcome the escaped convict, I had no thought for the grim humor of the situation. For the moment even I had no thought for myself, or of the cataclysm I was supposed by my companion to be there to bring about. I was more concerned to see if Roger Marske had returned from his dangerous proximity to Janet in London. A swift glance round showed that he was not in the apartment.

The sonorous tones of the Premier recalled me to a sense of present surroundings and to the vital necessity for all-round deception. I almost felt Herzog's eyes burning on the nape of my neck.

"In such a debt as you have laid on me, Mr. Martin, words count for little," said Lord Alphington, warmly gripping my hand. "I should like to *do* something. But there, you are a rich man, I am told, with no preoccupations beyond your health, and I must content myself with conventional thanks."

Gracious Heaven! Do something for me? If he would only take the noose from round my neck and restore my honor, was my unspoken thought, as I murmured a feeble reply.

With ready tact he passed on to Herzog after a minute's chat, which his quick intuition must have told him was for some reason painful to me, and I was taken in charge by Lady Muriel, who made much of me, and was much concerned lest I should have taken harm by my immersion. Sympathetic as she was, I was conscious that she was a little *distrait*. Her eyes kept wandering to the door, and I guessed that our dinner party was not complete. Some one else was expected, and my mind again reverted to Roger Marske. Somehow I could think of nothing that night but that Janet and he had gone away in the same steamer with, if my sweetheart's theory was right, diametrically opposite interests at stake. I have often speculated since whether animal magnetism, or some such influence, was at work upon me, inspiring the instinct that these two were under the same roof and she in dire peril.

It was not Roger Marske whom the butler presently ushered in, but, had it been, the name as it left his lips could hardly have caused me a greater shock.

"Mr. Ralph Carden," was the announcement which drew my gaze to the door in consternation, and told me that I stood on the verge of discovery. Yes, there was no shadow of doubt about it. The well-knit, sunburnt young fellow who entered was the same Ralph Carden who had joined the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in my last term there. That

had been ten years ago, but we had been cadets together for three months, and he could scarcely fail to recognize me.

The removal of my mustache was really in favor of such recognition. For though it had completely changed my recent appearance, it had made me much more closely resemble what I had been in my Woolwich days.

Carden advanced rapidly into the room with many apologies for being late, giving all his attention at first to Lady Muriel and Lord Alphington. It did not add to my comfort to perceive that my agitation was not lost upon Herzog, but I used the brief respite to brace myself, and when the ordeal came I was more prepared for it.

"Mr. Carden," said Lady Muriel, bringing him forward, "let me introduce you to Mr. Martin and his friend Dr. Barrables. You have heard of my narrow escape from drowning the other day. It was Mr. Martin who so gallantly jumped overboard and fished me out."

Ralph Carden held out his hand with frank impetuosity, born, I was to learn later, of gratitude to the man who had saved the woman he loved. Then, as his gaze met mine—I made no attempt to avert it—a spasm crossed his boyish face and the laughing eyes grew hard and cold. Whatever feeling may have been in his mind he mastered it quickly and with the natural instinct of a gentleman politely spoke a few words of conventional tribute to what he was pleased to call my pluck. But there was constraint in his voice, and I knew that if he had not

actually recognized me, he had been struck by my likeness to the now notorious "murderer."

Dinner was announced at that moment, and, as the honor of escorting Lady Muriel was allotted to me as the guest of the evening, the immediate tension was relieved. Only, however, to be diverted into another channel, for we were scarcely seated at table when Lady Muriel confided to me that she had had two dull days because her dear friend Miss Chilmark had been compelled to go to London unexpectedly.

"And Roger—you must have missed Roger," Lord Alphington chimed in rather anxiously, I thought. "Can't imagine what possessed the fellow to run off like that. He had no notion of it, I am sure, when he came down to the pier to meet me. His excuse of a telegram calling him away won't wash. No telegram was brought to him in the interval between my landing and his bolting off so unceremoniously as we were walking up."

"Mr. Marske's goings and comings are beyond me. I cannot say that I have missed him," was the rejoinder of Lady Muriel, which brought a frown to her father' brow, and such a pleased flush to Ralph Carden's cheek that even then, in my sore distress, I began to guess how matters were between these two young people.

From the general conversation that ensued I gathered that Carden was serving as a lieutenant in one of the batteries of Garrison Artillery stationed at Golden Hill Fort—the headquarters of the coast defense in that part of the island. His presence at the Premier's table was accounted for by the fact that he

was a distant connection, his mother residing in the "dower-house" on one of Lord Alphington's country estates. From the mutual reminiscences they exchanged, Lady Muriel and he had evidently known each other from childhood.

Herzog was very silent during dinner, playing the part of medical attendant to a wealthy invalid to perfection. What little he said was to the point, but not calculated to attract attention. It struck me that he was aiming at effacing himself, so that in the tragedy which he believed my waistcoat pocket to hold he might be forgotten.

"And pray, Mr. Martin," said Lord Alphington, turning to me presently with stately politeness, "what is your county when you are at home? I understand that you are not a permanent resident in this charming spot."

Herzog's foresight had provided for this emergency, and I was fairly ready with the reply that I lived in London the greater part of the year—a wide generality which my host's indifference, or politeness, deterred him from pressing to a conclusion. It was reserved for Ralph Carden to try to tempt me into particulars, and he did it with a clumsy eagerness, suggesting that he had been waiting his chance.

"If you will be there in October, and will give me your address, I should much like to call upon you," he said, fixing those honest eyes of his on me from across the circular table.

Once again Herzog's previous prompting met the emergency and prevented any inconvenient research in the London Directory. "It is very doubtful if I

shall be in town in October," I replied, shuddering at the painful truth of the remark.

"But if you are?" demanded my inquisitor, with a rude persistence that caused Lady Muriel to turn and look at him, and Lord Alphington to elevate his patrician brows.

"In that case I shall probably be found at the Savoy Hotel; I have no permanent residence at present," was my answer, uttered in the full knowledge that it must have sounded odd, and that had I been there otherwise than as the preserver of my beautiful young hostess I should have been regarded as an undesirable acquaintance. As it was, my privilege saved me from any overt unpleasantness of the kind, except that Carden, who had leaned forward to question me, sat back now, bolt upright, and looked hard at me before going on with his dinner.

It mattered not one jot to me, but socially I must have seemed a dismal failure to Lord Alphington and his daughter, and I have no doubt that they were making notes to that effect, while, minute by minute, the time drew near for me to face the crisis of the evening. That crisis came all too quickly with the rising of Lady Muriel, who, as she left the dining-room, flung back to us the laughing command not to leave her alone too long.

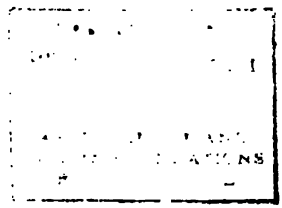
When we drew together over the decanters, the butler and footman having departed, our disposition at the table was thus: I sat on Lord Alphington's right, Carden on his left, and Herzog on Carden's left, with a long gap between him and me. The result was that my actions could not be closely

watched by Carden, but that Herzog, who was nearly opposite to me at the small round table, had me entirely under his observation.

The arrangement suited me admirably, for it mitigated a danger which had been entirely unforeseen when I entered the house. I had not expected to meet there a man who suspected my identity as Carden evidently did, and whose suspicions would almost certainly become open denunciation if he saw what I was about to do. It was a relief, therefore, to have Carden so placed that, with the Premier between us, I was comparatively hidden from him. As for Herzog, I asked for nothing better than that he should note my every action.

Lord Alphington passed the wine and pushed a couple of cigar boxes about, making conversation the while with the cheerful air of one who is performing a duty that will soon be over. He was glad, no doubt, that I had saved his daughter from drowning, and was honestly anxious to be civil to me, but he would have found the process more congenial if I had been—well, not preoccupied with the necessity of prolonging my life by squirting something into his glass.

The opportunity arrived when, having helped himself, he turned slightly to Carden to pass the decanter, at the same time asking his young relative's opinion of the wine. I had already removed the lid of the pill-box in my pocket, and now, quickly withdrawing the rubber tube, I stretched out the hand in which I held it concealed, as though to take a pear from a dish in the center of the table. In doing so my hand



"It Will Be Safer in My Possession."
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traveled directly over my host's glass, and during its passage I squeezed the bulb, meeting Herzog's inscrutable gaze as I did so.

The next moment Herzog's face went ashy gray. By some nervous mischance I dropped the murderous contrivance into the dish of fruit. I made a frantic effort to recover it, but Carden forestalled me. His hand shot out and his sinewy fingers closed on the syringe while I was still fumbling. He began to examine it keenly, but Herzog had managed to pull himself together.

"I will trouble you to hand me that little instrument, Mr. Carden, please," he said, with cool deliberation. "It will be safer in my possession than in Mr. Martin's. He will be the first to thank me for relieving him of it, for it is my duty, undertaken at his own request, to see that he does not indulge in a certain small failing of his."

Looking puzzled, Carden reluctantly complied with the demand. Lord Alphington, hospitably sorry that a guest should be so branded as a narco-maniac, covered my confusion with a series of grunts, and then sought consolation for the *contretemps* by draining his glass to the dregs.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNWITTING CHAMPION

NEVER during my enforced association with him had I greater cause to wonder at Herzog's power of control than in the moments following Lord Alphington's draught of wine. He had told me that the atropine was nearly instantaneous in its fatal effects, but there was nothing in his demeanor to show that he was in the presence of a man who might be expected to fall dead. On the contrary, he busied himself with his almonds and raisins in the detached manner of one who has had to make himself disagreeable from a sense of duty.

My own feelings at that juncture, so far as my noble host was concerned, were those of perfect complacence—for the simple reason that I knew that I had done him no injury. While dressing for dinner I had thoroughly washed out the bulbed tube, replacing the original infinitesimal contents with pure water. Hence my dismay when Herzog had asked to examine the tube on approaching the house, and my relief when he did not appear to detect that I had tampered with it. I knew that I should have to reckon with him

afterward, but I was fighting for my life hour by hour till Janet's return, and every minute gained was of untold value.

I argued that my terrible custodian could not, for considerations of his own safety, reveal my identity there, if he ever did it directly at all. He would have to do it in such a way as not to implicate himself, and that could not be so long as he was avowedly my companion. If he was accused of nothing more heinous, he would at least be held guilty of aiding my escape from prison.

I wondered further at his marvelous concealment of emotion when a quarter of an hour had elapsed and the Premier chatted on, in no way the worse for my bungling effort of jugglery. Well, Herzog would take it out of me later, no doubt, when we had retired from this august but farcical entertainment. In the meanwhile, my pretended compliance might have gained time for Janet's success.

As I sat taking an idiotic part in the perfunctory conversation necessary for the consumption of Lord Alphington's usual modicum of port, I was more seriously concerned with Ralph Carden's attitude. There lay my most imminent danger. He sat for the most part silent, and when he spoke at all it was to his noble relative on some subject of private interest. The great man himself was probably too bored to notice the electrical tension among his guests, but so marked was Carden's refusal to hold converse with Herzog or myself that I fully expected to spend that night in jail and to be delivered to the hangman on the morrow.

Not even Herzog's ingenuity could keep up the masquerade much longer, I was assured.

For all my preparedness I could not repress a start when the crisis came, as it did shortly after we entered the drawing-room. Lord Alphington had said good-night and had retired to the library on the plea of important business to attend to with a private secretary, who had just arrived. Lady Muriel was chatting to Herzog, who, to my surprise, had put himself in her way on entering the room; I was standing at an open French window, looking out over the moonlit sea; and before I turned my back on the room Carden had been examining some photographs at the table.

Suddenly a light tap on the shoulder caused me to wheel round and face him. He had quitted his purposeless occupation and had come forward to set at rest the question that had vexed him. The way in which he looked at me was in itself an accusation. It was difficult to believe that a face so boyishly good-humored could have grown so grave and stern.

"I want a word with you," he said peremptorily. "Shall it be here, or shall we step into the garden?"

"Here, by all means. There is too heavy a dew to make it pleasant on the grass in thin shoes," I answered carelessly, affecting to ignore the offensive intention of his tone.

"Well, then, to put it straight, I don't believe your name is Martin," he blurted out. "I once knew some one exactly like you, who ought to be in a very different place from this. Carry your memory back to Woolwich ten years ago. You are Arthur——"

And then, before he could utter my name and set

me the problem whether to lie or confess, Lady Muriel's clear voice rang out across the room, uttering the very word she had arrested on his lips.

"I say, Ralph," she called to him, "you must have been at Woolwich with Arthur Rivington—you know who I mean, the poor fellow who was falsely convicted of murder, and escaped the other day to America."

Carden turned round to her as though some one had fired a pistol close to his ear. Herzog had moved away from the girl, who was standing in the glow of a softly-shaded lamp, and there was nothing to suggest that the question had been prompted by him. In fact, the expression on Herzog's broad face was one of bewildered amusement, but there was always this about that face—that when it carried any expression it revealed the antithesis of his thoughts.

"Yes, I was at Woolwich, for one term, with Rivington. What of it?" said Carden, without moving away from me. There was a hidden menace in his attitude, as though he were ready to spring on me and secure me if occasion arose.

"Only this, that I am deeply interested in him, and am convinced that he was no more capable of those atrocious crimes than I am myself," Lady Muriel made answer firmly. "I thought you might enlighten me as to what he was like as a youth."

Herzog at this point, as though weary of a subject that had been threshed out in the newspapers and settled by the lawyers, strolled to the table and became engrossed in a book of prints.

"Any one would think that you knew the fellow yourself, as you espouse his cause so warmly," said

Carden, maintaining his vigilant attitude toward me. "From the published accounts of the trial I should not think there was a shadow of a doubt about his guilt."

"I have never seen Captain Rivington, but I know the girl he was engaged to, and from what she tells me there must have been a grievous miscarriage of justice," was the reply, for which I could have kissed the hem of Lady Muriel's pretty dinner dress. It was like balm to an open wound—that first word of human sympathy, except Janet's, that had come to me since my arrest.

"They don't make such mistakes in courts of justice nowadays," said Ralph Carden, a little doubtfully. He was moved, I really began to hope, by the vigorous advocacy of the woman he loved.

"I shouldn't like to think, Ralph, that you were as uncharitable as Mr. Marske; he won't listen to a word on Captain Rivington's behalf," my fair young champion went on hotly. "For myself, I cannot and will not believe that a bad man could have inspired such tender trust and unshaken love as Ja—I mean, my friend, has for that unfortunate. But you have not told me what sort of a fellow Rivington was at Woolwich?"

Carden had, perhaps unconsciously, relaxed his close watch on me at the mention of Roger Marske. His rival's view of the case seemed to demand opposition, even at the sacrifice of common sense and preconceived opinions, and the admission he now made showed that he might range himself in my camp after all.

"I shouldn't like to be unfair to the chap," he said more gently. "He was a goodish bit older than me, and left the Academy shortly after I joined, but I remember that he was kind toward the youngsters, and an all-round sportsman at football and cricket."

"There! that bears out what my friend says," cried Lady Muriel triumphantly. "Does your description tally with that of a man who would kill his mother and sister for gain? A hundred times no, and I shall be ashamed of you, Ralph, if you don't take my side about him when Mr. Marske returns."

Carden colored slightly and shot a glance at me, which he instantly averted when he saw how I was hanging upon his answer. "We will see about that," he laughed constrainedly. "Not that either your championship or mine is likely to do Rivington any good, especially as he has got away to America, but I'll go so far as this—I hope they won't catch him. Now sing us something, Muriel, and forget all these horrors."

As though to give effect to his dismissal of the subject he started to saunter to the piano, but I followed, and, touching him on the arm, said in a low tone: "When Lady Muriel interrupted us the discussion which you had invited was reaching rather an interesting point. Hadn't you better continue it?"

He swung round and faced me fairly. I detected no apology, but a trace of pity in the frank eyes.

"Would it serve any useful purpose?" he said.

"You are the best judge of that. You sought and raised a question as to the name I bear," I persisted.

His hand went to his fair mustache, he looked

down at the carpet, raised his face to mine again, and said diffidently: "A question can be waived, I suppose, *Mr. Martin.* Let us leave it at that."

With which he strode off to the piano, and while he arranged Lady Muriel's music, I was free to draw a long breath over yet another reprieve. But a movement near the table turned my attention to Herzog, who had remained stooping over the prints during—could I hope it was so?—Ralph Carden's conversion.

Herzog was straightening himself from his stooping posture, at the same time rubbing his large hands softly together, while every feature of his broad countenance expressed satisfaction. The sight of him plunged me back into the depths. I guessed that his wonderful insight had detected my danger from recognition by Carden, and that it was due to his inspiration that Lady Muriel had intervened at the psychological moment. He was aware of her enthusiasm on the subject; a mere suggestion from him would have sufficed to make her question Carden in the nick of time.

But what depressed me was that his could have been no kindly diplomacy. It could only have been directed at saving his own skin, or to enable me to make a fresh attempt on Lord Alphington's life—probably at both.

CHAPTER XX

THE COLONEL'S TIDINGS

CONTRARY to my expectations, Herzog made no reference, on our leaving "Ardmore," to the failure of the atropine tube to do its deadly work. Nor, when he did mention the matter as we were seated at breakfast next morning, did he indulge in the outburst of threats and reproaches that I had anticipated.

"Rather a warm time last night—what with one thing and another," he remarked, sipping his coffee and eyeing me askance.

"I knew as soon as Carden saw me that I was recognized; and so, I think, did you," I replied.

"Yes, and took steps, as you may have observed, to stifle the explosion by exciting Lady Muriel's ardor at the proper moment," said Herzog. "Carden was on the point of denouncing you, was he not? Well, my timely hint to that charming girl that he must have been acquainted with the notorious fugitive set her going with a vengeance, eh?"

"It was very adroit," I was fain to admit. Rebellious as I felt at being the catspaw of this scoundrel, it was impossible not to appreciate the clever-

ness of his shifts and expedients, and, after all, vile though his motive was, they were the only bulwarks between me and the scaffold—till Janet came back victorious.

"Adroit!" he repeated, chuckling. "That is more than you were, my friend. If by good fortune something hadn't gone wrong with the drug or the syringe, your awkwardness in dropping it would have created a serious situation for both of us. And I have never intended that our risks in this partnership should be equally balanced, you see."

I said nothing, but I was inwardly astonished that he made no charge against me of having withdrawn the poison from the tube. I could only attribute my immunity to his genuine relief that my treachery to him had been the means of saving him.

And then, after a pause, he spoke again, but his mood had changed from almost genial banter to savage cynicism. "See here, let us understand each other," he said, tapping his saucer with the spoon to punctuate his words. "With so many ardent female champions you are beginning to believe that you are really an innocent, ill-used individual, eh?"

"I pleaded 'Not Guilty' at my trial, and I have never taken that back," I said, with appropriate vagueness, for I dared not exasperate him with open defiance. But, my Heaven! how I looked forward to doing so when Janet had run "Danvers Crane" to ground.

Herzog pushed his plate away, and, rising, lit a cigar, frowning at me the while. Never yet since our first meeting at the obscure hotel at Southampton

had he displayed such open hostility to me, and never, strangely enough, had he shown greater indifference to the deadly design which was the sole reason of our being together. Not a word about any fresh attempt on Lord Alphington; not a word about handing me over to justice; only a gibe and a scowl. The man had no nerves, but he was evidently irritated. He seemed to have lost his grip somehow.

He walked to the window, puffing moodily at his cigar, till his attention was attracted by a telegraph messenger coming up the garden path. Muttering an exclamation, he went out to meet the boy at the front door, but almost immediately returned, looking blacker than ever.

"The wire is for Colonel Chilmark," he said. "Probably from his daughter to say that she is returning."

As he made the apparently trivial announcement that basilisk gaze of his tried to pierce my inmost thoughts, causing a recurrence of the never-satisfied fear that he had divined my connection with Janet.

"Was Colonel Chilmark expecting his daughter?" I asked with what carelessness I could command.

Herzog laughed his harshest. "People who stay at home are always expecting people who are away," was his enigmatic reply. And he added, with a sudden gust of impatience: "What do I know or care about these Chilmarks?"

The contents of the to me all-absorbing telegram were revealed sooner than I could have hoped by Mrs. Krance, when she bustled in to remove the breakfast things. She had just performed the same

office in the sitting-room across the passage, and, after the manner of landladies, she proceeded to enlarge upon the affairs of the other lodgers.

The Colonel, by her showing, had just received a telegram from his daughter, informing him that as the house she had been to look at near Harrow would not suit their requirements, she proposed to remain in London for a day or two longer in order to view other houses within easy distance of town. As she would be very busy moving from place to place, as the house-agents might direct, her father was not to look for letters, but she would wire each day before starting on her search, so that he might know that she was all right.

I had much ado to compose my face while Mrs. Krance prattled out this expanded version of the telegram. It was at once a relief and a disappointment. It showed that Janet had not come to any harm at the hands of Roger Marske, but it also pointed to her having so far failed in her effort to prove that he was the "Danvers Crane" of my sister's acquaintance. Reading between the lines, I discarded her prolonged house-hunt as a mere pretext for staying in London in the hope of meeting with better success. It might even be that she had struck a clue which she was following up.

Feeling, or, as I half feared, affecting to feel, no interest in Mrs. Krance's gossip, Herzog cut short her dissertation on the Colonel's loneliness, and proposed that we should go sight-seeing to Carisbrook Castle, and on the return journey leave the train at Yarmouth and come round to Totland Bay by the

afternoon boat, calling there on its way from Lymington. As he was not the man to take an academic interest in historic ruins, I suspected that he had some reason for being out of the place that day. Probably he did not wish to meet Lady Muriel or Ralph Carden. It was all one to me where I went, now that Janet had been heard of, and I gave a perfunctory assent.

From the moment of our starting to walk across the fields to Freshwater station, Herzog's mood changed to the airy philosopher's vein, characteristic of his lighter phase. He was the busy man out for a holiday again, determined to forget all preoccupations in the joy of fine weather, beautiful scenery, and nothing to do. Occasionally, during that brief lull in our drama, while we were, so to speak, off the stage, he almost degenerated into the cheapest of cheap trippers in the exuberance of his spirits. I was not deceived by all this. Five days in his company had taught me that when his sun appeared to be in the zenith there were storm clouds lurking on the horizon.

We "did" the ancient Castle in true tourist style, and I could imagine the sensations of the other tourists, who shared with us the voluble guide's description of the ill-fated monarch's attempt to squeeze through the bars of his prison window, if they had been told that the quiet listener rubbing shoulders with them had himself broken jail within the week. We inspected the donkey that works the treadmill over the well, visited the bowling green, climbed the crumbling keep, and then jolted back over the cruel island

railway as far as Yarmouth, where, according to Herzog's programme, we left the train and sought the pier.

We had not much time to spare, for the steamer was already alongside, discharging such of her passengers as were bound for Yarmouth and Freshwater. Those remaining on board to proceed to Totland were a comparatively small number, so that every one of them was visible to us as we took our places on the bridge deck. In those sad days the haunting dread of recognition had grown to be such a habit with me that I instinctively scanned our fellow passengers in detail. The last to come under my nervous scrutiny was Roger Marske, leaning with his back to us over the stern railing.

Herzog must have perceived him at the same moment, for he nudged my elbow and whispered:

"Let us go down into the bar. I am not sure of that fellow's attitude. He probably saw us come aboard, but the further we are from him the better."

I had no doubt in my own mind that Marske's attitude toward myself was a hostile one. His conduct when he shadowed us to the Branksome pine woods, and was so unaccountably quieted by Herzog, had been an open declaration, but just now anything he might do or say to my detriment was a minor consideration with me. I was more glad to see him, there on the steamer, than if he had been my dearest friend. His presence on the boat was the second relief of my anxiety about Janet that I had experienced that day. He must have quitted London to return to the Isle of Wight a few hours after the telegram to her father

had been dispatched, the deduction being that, if he had tried, he had failed to molest her, and that she was now pursuing her quest free from all danger of interference from that quarter.

So struck was I by Herzog's change from the bold front he had shown to Marske at our recent encounter, that when we were below I could not refrain from mentioning it. Instead of resenting my remark, as I had expected, he regarded me quite benevolently.

"This business, my friend, is teaching me what I had never thought to own—that I am not infallible," he said. "There is something going on that I do not understand, and had not provided for, and Mr. Roger Marske is at the bottom of it."

He was lighting one of his never-failing cigars as he concluded his sentence, and he paused, with the match flickering out, to shoot an unspoken, and, it seemed, beseeching question at me from his troubled eyes. But I met it with blank indifference. It was not for me to make a confidant and an ally of the man who had me in the toils, for no better reason than that he was at loggerheads with as great a scoundrel as himself.

If his dumb appeal was a plea for enlightenment on the intervention of Janet and for an explanation of Roger Marske's enmity—well, he had come to the wrong source for both. I was not going to place a card in this ruthless player's hand simply to secure his allegiance against Marske, who was not half such a load on my back as he was himself. My faith of winning through was pinned to Janet alone, so I answered him with a shrug, and he answered it with

another. It was almost like a mutual understanding.

When the steamer bumped the landing-stage at Totland we remained below till all the passengers had cleared out, and then, as we walked up the pier, we had the satisfaction of seeing Roger Marske's tall form well ahead of us. I was glad that Lady Muriel had not come down to meet him, for even amidst my misery I had found a warm corner in my heart for young Ralph Carden's aspirations, and had I been a free agent I would have done my level best to back the boy's suit.

But the love affairs of Lady Muriel and young Carden were soon to be driven out of my head by matters more nearly concerning myself. We had reached our lodgings and entered our sitting-room, when Mrs. Krance, bristling with importance, followed us in and shut the door.

"A rare to-do yonder," she said, prodding her finger toward Colonel Chilmark's apartment. "He's had a wire this afternoon, from the party at whose house Miss Janet was staying, to say as the young lady hasn't been there since yesterday morning. She'd ordered dinner to be ready when she should come back from the country at night, but she never came back at all."

CHAPTER XXI

IN DEAD OF NIGHT

ANY confirmation that I needed of my suspicion that Herzog had divined my interest in Janet was furnished by his demeanor while I received the staggering blow contained in Mrs. Krance's news. I could feel that my consternation was an open book to him, which he was reading without the slightest attempt at concealment. Strangely enough, searching as was his scrutiny of me, it had in it rather pity than menace.

Seeing that I was capable of nothing but an incoherent exclamation, he turned to the garrulous landlady. "I presume that the Colonel thinks that the first telegram was a bogus one, sent by some miscreant in Miss Chilmark's name?" he said.

"That's exactly what the poor old gentleman does think, sir," Mrs. Krance replied. "She may have been made away with, up in that wicked town, and then the person that did it sent the telegram to keep the Colonel quiet and prevent inquiries for some days."

"Humph, that's one way of looking at it, but there

is another," Herzog grunted, and then he added, after a pause: "See here, Mrs. Krance, it is a privilege to help people who cannot help themselves. Convey my compliments to Colonel Chilmark, and say that I have had some experience in this kind of case, and that I shall be pleased to place it at his disposal if he would like to see me."

The landlady sped across the passage, and was back immediately with Colonel Chilmark's grateful compliments, and he would be glad to avail himself of "Doctor Barrables'" kind offer.

Without a word to me, Herzog left the room, and after a vain attempt to discuss the matter with me, Mrs. Krance also departed. Left alone, I had to bring all my manhood into play to keep from breaking down utterly. That Roger Marske was the author of the telegram received by Colonel Chilmark in the morning was to me self-evident. That, without handing myself over to the hangman, I could not make it evident to any one else was my dilemma. That Marske had fallen foul of Janet on her quest, sent the telegram to defer inquiry, and hurried back to the Isle of Wight in order to prove an *alibi* if necessary, seemed beyond question.

And that Marske alone could have sent the telegram was only too obvious. The author of it was aware of Janet's ostensible reason for going up to London, and Marske had traveled up by the same train, doubtless meeting her on the way and hearing from her the only explanation of her journey which to him of all people in the world she would be able to furnish. If she had fallen into the clutches of any

chance bird of prey, bent on vulgar robbery, or worse, there would have been no such intimate knowledge of her affairs as was disclosed in the morning telegram. To me it all seemed as clear as noonday—that she had followed a hot scent after "Danvers Crane," which had led her into the power of the man who had used that alias during his relations, whatever they may have been, with my unfortunate sister.

Yet, with this well-founded thesis to work from—a clue which a village policeman could not have missed—I was powerless to move a finger, unless I gave myself up to justice. And if I did that, well, I knew that the word of a convicted and escaped felon would not weigh for a single instant against that of a man in Marske's position—the son of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the guest of the Prime Minister. My story would be set down at once as an impudent fabrication, without even the recommendation of being plausible; besides which, as the day fixed for my execution was already past, it was very doubtful if I should get a chance to tell my story to any one in authority. As a condemned prisoner I was already dead in the eyes of the law, and I should go straight to my doom without a hearing. No, the heroic course would be to wipe myself out of existence, and to leave Janet at the mercy of her enemy—if she was still alive.

An appeal to my kind sympathizer, Lady Muriel, would fare no better, for with all the will in the world she would be impotent to help me, unless she could show grounds for suspecting Roger Marske, and that she could not do unless I could be produced as her

authority. Thus again, in the absence of any light Janet might have thrown on the matter, there would be nothing but the unsupported accusation of a condemned convict against a highly-placed gentleman to trust to—the same broken reed as if I gave myself up directly.

I could see no way out of it. Despair, for myself a little, for the girl who had gone forth to fight for me, a whole ocean, hedged me in on every side. I was wishing myself dead, when the now familiar face of the telegraph boy appeared at the garden gate. A minute later Mrs. Krance entered with a message for Herzog, and she had hardly retired when the owner hurried in and tore it open.

As he read he drew a long breath, and as he re-read the telegram he expelled the draught of air from his lungs as though he were ridding himself of a nausea. From the brief time he took over the perusal I guessed that the message, unlike the others which he had been receiving, was not in cipher. In his treatment of it, too, I noticed a difference. The cipher telegrams he had instantly destroyed by tearing them into infinitesimal fragments or burning them in the grate. This one he carefully folded and put away in his pocket-book.

Then, without any reference to it, he looked up at me, his broad features breaking into a slow, almost paternal smile. Heaven, how I hated him!

"I have been comforting the Colonel," he said, in his most cynical tone. "Let me also comfort you, my friend. I have been telling him that young ladies who wish to prolong their—shall we call them—holi-

days, are sometimes driven to strange shifts and expedients. In short, I pointed out to him that, far from having met with some disaster, his daughter might very well have sent that first telegram herself, having good reason for not returning to sleep last night at the house of the old servant with whom she was to stay. She might, for instance, though I did not moot this to the Colonel, be engaged in trying to pull chestnuts out of a very hot fire for a sweetheart unable to perform the operation for himself."

"You devil!" I snarled, guessing that his impromptu kindness had had for its object the pumping of the Colonel.

Herzog continued to smile. "You are rude," he said, "for a man who ought to have been hanged the day before yesterday. Yes, I comforted that invalid warrior, and I would have you also take comfort, my gallant captain, for I know that your trouble is the same. After a little discursive talk, the Colonel cleared up a point that had been puzzling me by admitting that Miss Janet knew the notorious Rivington *slightly*—is it not right to emphasize that word, my friend?"

"You must make what use you choose of your cunningly-gained discovery, but expect no information from me," I replied sullenly.

He looked as though intending to make an angry retort, but checked whatever he had been about to say, and remained silent for the rest of the evening, smoking, and evidently thinking deeply. Even in my sore distress about Janet, I derived some amusement from his knitted brows and impatient ejacula-

tions, which I attributed, quite erroneously as I was to learn later, to his sudden discovery that I was an innocent man, and therefore useless to him as an assassin. The problem perplexing him touched me more nearly, and if I had only known it I should have done better by helping him to a solution.

It was only as we lit our candles to go upstairs that he flung at me the remark: "You will have cause to regret your reticence before many hours are over, Rivington."

"You mean that because you have found out there is an honest girl who believes in me, your plot against the Premier stands revealed as hopeless, and that you will therefore have me recaptured?" I retorted.

But he shook his head almost sadly. "I cannot tell you whence your danger will spring—for the good reason that as yet I do not know," he answered. "Not from me, for in that case I should fall with you. This case has been a surprise packet all along, but I have not given up hope yet."

Hope of what, in all conscience? I wondered, as I undressed and prepared for a night of wakeful unrest. Hope that, guiltless though I was of previous crime, I should fulfil the dreadful mission for which I had been released rather than be hanged? If so he would be grievously disappointed. Or could he mean that he hoped to save himself from the consequences of association with me during that fateful week? I could not tell, but as I flung myself on the bed I groaned in spirit at the thought that whatever hope there might be for him there was not a single ray for me.

It had begun to rain heavily during the evening, and now the wind rose, raising a swell on the beach that broke with a rhythmical cadence which would have lulled me to sleep at any other time. As it was, the wild voice of nature, the drip from the sycamores in the garden, the steadily increasing thunder of the waves, and the sob of the westerly gale, braced my senses to unusual alertness. I had left my window open, and so gained the full effect of the storm.

Lying wide awake on the bed, I was watching the ragged clouds chase each other across the angry sky, when suddenly the lower half of the open window was darkened by the shape of a human head. I remained perfectly still, staring at the motionless head and wondering grimly if after all this was the kind of danger Herzog had prophesied for me. If so, it was a welcome change from the anticipated knock at the front door by a posse of policemen.

For upward of two minutes the head remained as still as I did, and then it began to shift a little to the right and left. I knew quite well what was going on. The owner of the head, having satisfied himself that I was asleep, was endeavoring to locate my person on the bed. I could not discern his features, because they were toward the darkness of the room, and such faint light as came from the storm-wracked sky was behind him. He kept his full face inwards, preventing me from getting so much as the effect of an old-fashioned daguerreotype, which his profile would have yielded.

This was not the arm of the law, but some one who wanted to murder me, and whom I should be justified

in throttling, I told myself with a suppressed joy that glowed through my veins. I knew then how fiercely I had wanted to strangle some one—Herzog for choice—all the evening, and it was with savage anticipation that I watched the head desist from its focusing movements and rise higher with the clear intention of creeping through the window. The plash of the rain and the howling of the wind drowned any sound the intruder might have made, giving the impression of something sinuous and snakelike creeping in on me as one long leg was lifted over the sill.

I waited breathless, ready to spring, and then the door of my room opened with a jerk, and a shaft of light from a bull's-eye lantern, held by Herzog, fell full on the face of my nocturnal visitant. It was the face of Roger Marske.

CHAPTER XXII

A STRANGE ALLIANCE

IT was but a fleeting vision that we had of Roger Marske, for no sooner did the ray from Herzog's lantern fall upon him than he ducked down and disappeared. It lasted long enough, however, to explain the purpose of his midnight visit, for in his mouth, carried there doubtless to free his hands for the climb, was a long dagger or bowie knife.

I joined Herzog as he strode to the window, and peered down into the gloom, but of the intruder there was no sign. He had completely vanished, and was presumably making his way through the shrubs back to the grounds of "Ardmore."

"Humph! Clambered up by that Virginia creeper," said Herzog, shutting his window and proceeding to light the candle on the dressing-table. "I think you owe me thanks, my friend."

I hated to be beholden to him, so I answered surlily enough that I should not have been taken by surprise, as I had been wide awake and ready to give a good account of myself.

Herzog chuckled, and I noticed now that he seemed in high good-humor.

"Well, well," he said; "at any rate I warned you that you would be in danger, and you profited by my advice to be vigilant. I was in two minds whether your peril would take this form or that of an incursion by police-officers. I am delighted that it came in the shape of Mr. Roger Marske, for now I can play the game with a knowledge of my opponent's cards. Just cast your eye over this telegram that I received this evening."

I saw that it had been handed in at the Charing Cross post-office at six o'clock, and, besides the address, contained only the two words: "*Business off.*"

"That," proceeded Herzog, as he carefully restored the message to his pocket-book, "refers to your little affair, or rather to what would have been your affair if you had been the truculent ruffian you were supposed to be. It is a prearranged signal informing me that the scheme has been abandoned. Lord Alphington's life is no longer threatened, and, personally, I rejoice, for I am not by nature a bloodthirsty man. Now I am going to be perfectly frank with you, Rivington, in the hope of tempting you to equal frankness. That telegram was sent by, or on behalf of, Sir Gideon Marske, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and one of my superiors in the unpleasantness we have been engaged in."

"Roger Marske's father?" I exclaimed, more concerned with the intimate bearing of his revelation on my own fate than with the tremendous fact that Cabinet Ministers should have conspired against the life of a colleague.

"Ah, you begin to see the connection of things,"

Herzog said. "Yes, if Roger Marske had not been playing a lone hand, about which you will, perhaps, enlighten me presently, I should have stood in a very different relation toward you to what I do at this minute."

And depositing his heavy frame in one of Mrs. Krance's unreliable chairs, while I sat on the bed, he told me the secret history of his mission to release me in order to assassinate Lord Alphington. How, with the connivance of the Home Secretary, he had worked the business at the prison; how he had doubted my fitness for the job, almost from the first interview with me at Southampton; and how he had begun to scent an entirely unforeseen combination of private influences, the moment he perceived Lady Muriel's interest in the case on the boat, the day of our arrival at Totland. It had not taken him long to specify Janet Chilmark as the "friend" mentioned by Lady Muriel; thence onward his aim had been, not, as I had believed, to turn me loose as a savage murderer on Lord Alphington, but to trace out the intricacies of Roger Marske's hostility to me, as evidenced by his pitiless talk on the boat.

He told me, with a fat wheeze of enjoyment, that he had arranged the excursion to Bournemouth for the express purpose of proving to himself his suspicion that Roger Marske had not only guessed my identity, but had private reasons of his own for desiring either my death or recapture.

"I had hard work to keep him quiet, there in the pine wood, and only did it by telling him the truth—that your escape had been contrived at the instance

of his father, Sir Gideon," said Herzog. "I did not tell him that from that moment my allegiance to that sinful old statesman was broken, and that such wit as I possess was to be devoted to paying off an old score against him."

"But what about the atropine business, at which I checkmated you the other night?" I asked. "That didn't look like sparing Lord Alphington."

"Checkmated me!" Herzog sneered quite amiably. "That was all a harmless device for settling the question, upon which even then I had no certainty, whether you were really meaning to kill his lordship or not. When I gave you the supposed fatal squirt there was nothing in it but rose-water. I was compelled to use a scent, so that when I examined it before going in I could readily ascertain whether you had, as I expected you would, washed it out and refilled the thing with pure water. So much for your checkmating, my friend."

I positively began to admire his cunning on that occasion, since it had no baser object than to give the lie to the murderous protestations with which I had sought to deceive him.

"To return to Roger Marske," he went on in more serious tone. "My own position toward the Marskes, father and son, is this. Years ago, when I was in the Inland Revenue service, I fell into an error, of which Sir Gideon took advantage to bind me to him body and soul as the doer of any dirty work he required. I had no option. I either had to become his bond-slave or go to hard labor—an alternative for which neither my habits nor my figure are adapted. Now

Roger Marske by his conduct toward you, by his following your friend, Miss Chilmark, to London, still more by his intention to kill you to-night, has given himself away as deeply implicated in your affair. Am I right that you and your plucky little sweetheart think that he ought to stand in your shoes?"

Could I trust this professor of chicanery and crime with so much as we knew of the vital secret which Janet had gone to try to probe? He read the doubt in my eyes, for he hastened to add:

"I think I am your only chance, Rivington, and probably Miss Chilmark's, too. If I knew why she went to London I might be able to help you, and her, too, poor girl, if Sir Gideon Marske has allowed her to live so long."

"Sir Gideon? Roger, you mean," said I in my blundering way. My dull wits could not grasp on the spur of the moment where Sir Gideon came in.

But Herzog's could. "You forget the telegram I had from Sir Gideon this evening, cancelling the plot against the Prime Minister," he said. "That is evidence to me that Sir Gideon has become suddenly aware of these private complications. He can only have learned of them from our friend of window-scaling proclivities, and whatever his information may be, it almost certainly includes the fact of your innocence. Does it also include a knowledge of the guilty?"

He paused and looked at me, but I made no sign as yet. Herzog went on, still more impressively: "Take my word for it, Rivington, that whatever is wrong with Miss Chilmark, that old man is in it—up to the hilt. That attempt on you to-night shows that they

have been hard hit by the girl, and that they want to silence you without recapture if possible, though, having failed with the knife, they will probably fall back on the hangman's rope if we don't look slippy. And if they want to treat you like that, what sort of mercy is the girl to hope for—the girl to whom I figuratively take off my hat as a fat old terrier might do to a smart little ferret that has bolted the rat for him. Sir Gideon and Roger are my rats, Rivington, and they are on the run, but they will get clear away if you don't decide to trust me."

"You don't care a tinker's rap about me, or about Miss Chilmark," I said tentatively. "What's your motive?"

Herzog waved the cigar, which he had taken care to light, slowly to and fro, admiring the gyrations of the smoke. "Not revenge, my friend—nothing so crudely useless as that," he smiled at me. "I am an advocate for reciprocity in trade. In short, I want to reverse the lever, and have a pull over Sir Gideon, that is all; so that I may not be called upon to assist in assassinating any more Premiers with blunt instruments. But if, in the process of reversing the lever, Roger Marske gets hanged instead of you, I shall not complain."

At that I hesitated no longer, as I should have done had he professed any but a selfish purpose in serving me. The man was a monster of iniquity, but his interests so clearly ran side by side with my own in confounding the Marskes, that I judged it best to clutch at the only straw held out to me. Moreover, he had guessed and wormed out so much for himself

that there remained but little to confide to him but Janet's solution of my poor sister's cryptic utterance, and our hope of connecting "Danvers Crane" with Roger Marske.

Herzog listened with increasing gravity, noting down the address of Mrs. Webley at Notting Hill, and of the Bloomsbury lodging-house where Janet was to sleep, but he made no comment till at the close of my narrative I pressed him for his opinion. I was as anxious for it, now that we had joined forces, as though we had been in the same camp all along.

"It is impossible even to surmise what has happened," he replied thoughtfully, as he flicked the ash from his cigar. "It sems tolerably certain that Roger Marske has either been so hard pressed by Miss Chilmark that he had to confess to Sir Gideon and seek his aid, or that the old man has nosed out the trouble for himself, through the young lady's pursuit having led her into his neighborhood. Fortunately there is good reason to believe your devoted champion has left us a good clue, which ought to be worked at once."

"What clue?" I asked breathlessly.

"Mrs. Webley should be called on without the loss of a single hour. She will be able to say what address, if any, she gave to Miss Chilmark, and if it is anywhere in the district which Sir Gideon Marske honors with his residence, there ought to be a pretty hot scent," said Herzog. "In any case, the institution of inquiries round about Marske Hall, near Brentwood, might lead to discoveries. It would be quite natural for me to go there to see that old scoundrel to report to him; in fact, I am rather surprised that the tele-

gram did not contain a summons for me to wait upon him. The trouble is what to do with you."

"Do not let any considerations about me stand for one single moment in the way of your finding Miss Chilmark," I urged.

"But, my friend, it is just that that I must do if you are to be of any use to me," my new ally replied with a candor so brutal that it was bound to be genuine. "If you are caught and hanged before I can bring your alleged crime home to Roger Marske I shall never bring it home to him. I simply shouldn't be listened to if I came with the fullest proof. Every official nerve would be strained to cover up such an enormous miscarriage of justice. I know, because it has been done before, my friend. No, I must put you away somewhere while I go Marske hunting; and where to put you, God only knows."

"You think, that Roger Marske having failed to finish me, they will, as you said, substitute the rope for the knife?"

"Undoubtedly; and they will take precious good care to effect your recapture in such a way that you will be quickly spirited off, in fact will see that you don't have a chance to open your mouth. They will not, however, attempt to take you till I have cleared out. That was the arrangement if the scheme broke down, and they don't know that I have rounded on them yet. They won't squander me by arresting you in my company, for they may want me again. But if I left you here at Mrs. Krance's you would be taken to-morrow and strung up the day after."

"Then," I hazarded, with one of those gleams of

reason which stupid people sometimes get at a pinch, "why shouldn't I lay up in one of the empty houses here? I have noticed several, and it is too late in the season for them to be let to summer visitors now."

Herzog jumped up and barely restrained himself from waking the household by slapping his fat thigh in his excitement. "My friend," he wheezed genially, "that is the first lucid suggestion you have made since our acquaintance began. Get into your clothes, while I go and get into mine. You must be out of this and safely ensconced before daylight breaks."

CHAPTER XXIII

A RISKY HIDING-PLACE

THE secrecy of our departure from Mrs. Krance's hospitable abode was aided by the fury of the storm, which drowned all other sounds but its own. Luckily the front door was on the sheltered side, so that we were able to slip out without admitting an inrush of wind.

"Had you any particular house in your mind?" Herzog asked, when we had got clear of the premises into the rain-whipped road.

I told him that I had noticed a furnished house, standing in its own grounds, beyond the green walk on the way to the warren. It had the advantage from my point of view of being some little distance from the populous parts of the village in a comparatively secluded position, and as its garden in the rear backed on the edge of the cliff there would be no fear of being surprised from that quarter. I should have only the front of the house to patrol in keeping watch for the officers of the law.

"One of those stone houses, eh?" said Herzog, with swift comprehension. "The very place of all others, provided no systematic search is made for

you here, and I shall endeavor to prevent that by drawing a herring across your trail. And even if they do go in for a house-to-house visitation, you would have a better chance of a run for it there than at this end. Come along, and take cover if we meet any one."

But at two o'clock on such a tempestuous night there was no one abroad in that community of pleasure-seekers, and we passed unmolested along the deserted walk, with only the great winking eye of the revolving light at Hurst Castle on the mainland opposite to watch our progress. Arrived at the house—a long, low, somewhat gloomy-looking structure, on its landward side, since all the best rooms faced the sea—we naturally found the doors locked against us, but Herzog's penknife soon slipped a window fastening, and we entered what from the feel of the furniture we judged to be the drawing-room. It was as yet too dark to see anything, and Herzog would not risk lighting so much as a match.

"Now I must return to 'Springthorpe' before dawn breaks," said my companion. "It will not do for that early bird, Mrs. Krance, to find me out, or the lies I mean to tell her about your having left by the first boat when she comes in with the breakfast things will miss their mark. And, talking about breakfast, reminds me that you mustn't starve in your lonely citadel. As soon as the shops are open in the morning I shall buy a stock of provisions and bring it along before I start for London by the mid-day boat. So long."

With an agility wonderful in one of his bulk he

swung himself through the window and was gone, leaving me to grope about in the dark and put on as best I could the dry clothes I had brought in a small portmanteau. The wind howled and the rain pattered outside; but, feeling that at any rate I was secure for an hour or two, I felt about till I found a sofa, and, flinging myself on it, lay down and slept from sheer weariness. I was indeed temporarily exhausted both mentally and physically.

When I woke it was broad daylight, and, glancing at my watch in full recollection of the events of the night, I saw that it was seven o'clock. My immediate surroundings claimed my first attention. The room in which I found myself was of moderate size, furnished with the unhomelike gimcrackery prevalent in houses which are let rather than lived in. Extending my explorations to the other rooms and floors, I found the same note struck everywhere. This was no man's home, but an investment, to be let with all its appurtenances and make money out of. And, judging by the musty smell of unoccupation, it had not found favor with temporary tenants for a considerable time.

So much the better for me. There was less likelihood that an enterprising house-agent would bring clients to look at it, and, barring the systematic search of which Herzog had spoken, that seemed the only danger of my lair being disturbed.

The front of the house abutted on a leafy lane, but from the back one got a glorious view of sea and sky, with an untended but luxurious garden in the foreground. No fence was needed on this side, either

as a boundary or as a protection against intruders, for the cliff dropped straight from the grounds, running sheer for a score of feet only, and then continuing in a gentler, verdure-clad slope to the beach below. At that height above the sea-level the shore was invisible from the ground-floor windows, but from those above I could just see the line of high water-mark, and, almost immediately below me, the lifeboat-house and launching slip. Under normal conditions I would have found much to admire in this scene; one well calculated to inspire artist or poet, and incite uplifting thoughts in anyone of a refined nature. But now my mind was concentrated firmly on the terrible position in which I was placed; there was no time for a flight into the realms of estheticism.

In learning so much of my surroundings I was careful not to disarrange the drawn blinds, my research being restricted to peering from behind them. A face at the windows of an unoccupied house would have set tongues wagging if seen from one of the yachts or pilot-cutters anchored in the bay, where, the rain having ceased, the sailors were busily swabbing down the decks of the larger craft.

Before long a healthy hunger turned my thoughts to Herzog's promised return with a supply of provisions, and I stationed myself at the window where we had effected our entrance, as it was at the back of the house and he might be expected to make for it. Sure enough at about half-past nine there came a tap on one of the lower panes, and I drew aside the blind a little—to start back in dismay.

He who stood without was a bearded, black-visaged

man, whose blue guernsey and seafarer's cap stamped him either as a fisherman or one of the longshore loafers who pose as such.

On perceiving that it was not Herzog, I had dropped the blind like lightning, but the man must have seen me, for he drummed lightly on the glass again, and kept on drumming while I racked my distraught brain for the best course to pursue.

JANET'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

CHAPTER XXIV

SIR GIDEON'S BARGAIN

WHEN the footman had departed with his master's orders to fetch "Mr. Roger," the old man turned to me with a suave courtesy that somehow struck the first real note of failure in the task I had undertaken. If he had thrown something at me, or abused me, for bringing an accusation of murder against his son, I should have felt more comfortable than under his polite:

"Do, pray, sit down. You must be fatigued after the experience you have gone through."

There was no satire or incredulity in his tone now, but there was an undefined *something* in it that frightened me into obeying his behest. I was not, however, so frightened that I was unable to perceive the very careful preparations he was making to receive "Mr. Roger." He rearranged a reading-lamp on his table, so that the light was shaded from his own hawk-like face, but fell full on the door, and

he slightly wheeled his chair in the same direction.

It was not long before a quick step sounded outside, and my fear of the old man was momentarily effaced by an all-consuming curiosity as to how the young one would behave in such trying circumstances. To most people, I presume, it would be distinctly embarrassing to be confronted with a woman whom you thought that you had just succeeded in burning to death; but these Marskes, from what I *knew* of the son and seemed to *dread* in the father, were evidently out of the common ruck.

The door opened, and surely enough it was Roger Marske who entered. "How are you, sir?" he began, without seeing me. "I have been in London all day on business, so thought I would run down and sleep here. Great God in Heaven! Who is that?"

The exclamation followed swift on his sudden recognition of me, and the wild words, emphasized by his backing toward the door, were tantamount to a confession—to a confirmation of what I had been impressing on Sir Gideon. How would Sir Gideon take it? By choosing to ignore it, and by accepting any excuse his son might give for his consternation on seeing me?

On the contrary, and much to my surprise, Sir Gideon accepted the tacit admission conveyed in that outburst of alarm as fully as I could have hoped. Just for a moment he bowed his head and held his thin hand before his eyes, as though overcome by emotion; then, with a quick gesture of self-mastery, he pointed sternly to the door.

"Go into the dining-room. I shall follow you

directly," he said, adding, as Roger Marske turned to go, the one whip-like word, "Stop."

My wretched persecutor halted and faced his father. "Do not attempt to leave the house," the latter snarled. "If you do I shall turn the men out to scour the countryside within five minutes."

The younger Marske shot a furious glance at the elder, who returned it with a stony stare, as it seemed to me watching his sideface. But Roger must have read something in his father's countenance to expedite his departure, and also to inspire a calmer mood. For, as he swung round on his heel to the door, I thought that I detected the gleam of another expression in his cruel eyes. What it was I could not exactly define, but it semed to me that the fierceness had been replaced by a blend of cunning and curiosity.

As soon as the door had closed on him, Sir Gideon rose from his chair and approached me, all the fire and vehemence gone from his demeanor. Do what he would he could not make himself a pleasant personality, but at that moment I could find it in my heart to pity him—such a picture of despair and grief did he present.

"I need hardly say what a blow this is to me, Miss Chilmark," he faltered in a broken voice. "I fill a high station in the service of the State; my ambition for my son was boundless. Your news to-night has shattered all that, and much more besides. I shall never hold up my head again. For my son's behavior on entering the room leaves me no option but to accept unreservedly your account of his treatment

of you to-day—whatever may be his guilt in that other affair."

"I am sorry for you," was all the answer I could muster.

"That is kind, and—er—encouraging, because we are entirely in your hands, and I have a favor to ask. I should wish to hear my son's version from his own lips, alone and uninterrupted. Have I your permission to join him for that purpose? I will give you my word of honor that he shall not leave the house."

The pathos of the request, made to a helpless girl by a great statesman amid the splendor of his own mansion, was not to be denied. At any rate, I am not so constituted as to have made a scene and insisted on sending for the police without allowing an interview. I bowed a silent assent.

"I thank you, and I will not keep you waiting long," said Sir Gideon, and he quitted the room with the air of a State prisoner going to execution on Tower Hill. I found myself wondering how an old man of such repulsive appearance could manage to speak and walk with so much dignity in such trying circumstances. I suppose I was getting a little hysterical over my successful chase of Roger Marske, and perhaps after my physical trials that day, for suddenly I began to laugh. Sir Gideon, I told myself, had acquired his self-control while answering embarrassing questions in the House of Commons about a graduated Income Tax. I have often heard my father abusing him for his callous indifference to the burdens of the poor.

And then I was recalled from my silliness to respect

for the man to whom I had administered such a shock by the entrance of a footman bearing a tray on which were wine, biscuits, and fruit.

"With Sir Gideon's compliments, miss," said the servant, placing the much-needed refreshment to my hand, and retreating without the expected sniff at my bedraggled attire.

My hunger overcame the natural repugnance I felt to accept the hospitality of any one of the name of Marske, and I fell to on the contents of the tray with zest. I had hardly finished when Sir Gideon returned, and though I thought nothing of it at the time, I remembered afterward the furtively eager glance he directed at the traces of my light repast—as though to gauge my practicability by my willingness to eat and drink under his roof.

Full of years as he was, he seemed to have aged still more during his brief absence from the room. Treading heavily, and with bowed head, he advanced to his chair and sat down in it with a sigh, as though grateful for the rest.

"I must think of you first; you must be in great suspense," he began, struggling with a catch in his voice. "It is all too true—this charge you bring. My unhappy son did commit the crime of which Captain Rivington was convicted. Nay, hear me out," he broke off, as I leaped to my feet jubilant. "Rivington can—I hope will—be cleared, and Roger must bear his load of shame and misery. But, oh, Miss Chilmark, I come to you as a suppliant."

"For what?" I asked with a tinge of suspicion. It seemed to me that there was nothing more to be

done than that Arthur should be released by the King's pardon and Roger Marske be arrested.

"For my son's life, or, to speak more correctly, for the barest chance for it," replied Sir Gideon, eyeing me askance. "I have kept my word to you; he has not left the house, and will not do so—unless you give me permission to tell him that he may try to make good his escape. In return for your clemency, I will engage to furnish you with certain proofs which my son has indicated to me for the establishment of Rivington's innocence, and, alas! his own guilt. The disgrace I must bear as best I can; it is only for his life, if he can save it by flight, that I plead."

All my instincts were up in arms at that. "You mean," I said hotly, "that if I do not consent to your terms, the proofs you mention will not be forthcoming?"

For the fraction of a second a scowl creased his wrinkled forehead at the bluntness of my question, but his parliamentary training came to the rescue. He waved a deprecating hand.

"Not quite that," he said smoothly. "But you will understand, being a young lady of so keen an intelligence, that if you demanded my son's arrest to-night here in my house, you could not expect the same facilities that a more yielding attitude would entitle you to. I should, naturally, after my son's arrest, be deeply concerned in moving heaven and earth in his defense."

I understood, or thought I did, not only that, but a good deal more beside. I understood that my

conversation with this astute old gentleman had been entirely without witnesses, and that he intended to repudiate everything that had passed if I did not accede to his demand. I had no reason but a woman's reason for thinking that he would be so wicked, but, to put it plainly, I did not "like his looks." That dislike influenced the course I took—that and my eagerness to obtain proofs of Arthur's innocence without a day's delay.

"What do you propose?" I asked.

"That I may tell Roger that he may make his escape—with at least fifteen hours' start it will be, if he goes at once," replied Sir Gideon, leaning toward me. "Then, to-morrow, I will myself take you to where you can verify the confession he made to me just now. If you will do me the honor to be my guest to-night, my housekeeper—I am a widower, and there are no ladies in the family—shall attend to your comfort, and in the morning I will drive you to the place where the proofs are to be obtained."

"Very well," was my answer. "It shall be as you wish, but I would prefer not to spend the night here."

"You have made me a heavy debtor," said Sir Gideon rising. "Roger shall be gone in twenty minutes, and you will find me prompt in carrying out my part of the compact. But will you not reconsider your decision not to sleep here? Even if I sent you to Brentwood in a carriage you would be too late to catch the last train, and there are no hotels there where you would——"

"Where they would take me in this condition late at night and without luggage," I helped him out.

"In that case I must avail myself of your offer."

"It will enable us to start early to-morrow," said Sir Gideon. "I will send the housekeeper to you at once." And with bent head and feeble gait he went from the room.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FACE AT THE GANGWAY

I DID not sleep well that night. Owing to the lateness of the hour and the remoteness of the mansion from other dwellings, I had very little choice in the matter, unless I was to seek a convenient hayrick, but no sooner had I been shown into a bedroom by a respectful and profusely sympathetic housekeeper, than the incongruity of my position struck me with full force.

Marske Hall seemed the last place in the world in which my friends and well-wishers, had they known of the circumstances, would have desired me to lay my head. In the well-ordered house of a Cabinet Minister, with troops of servants within call, I was not really apprehensive of personal danger. But the fact remained that I was in the enemy's country, and I was particular to look to the defenses of my bedroom door.

The night passed, however, without any occasion for alarm, and breakfast was brought up to me by a resourceful maid, who helped me to remove from my clothes the traces of my scramble at the burning Mill House. I guessed by her manner that she had been specially instructed not to show surprise

at the state of my garments, and I have often wondered since what reason had been given to her. It could not have been the right one, for she chattered about the fire as if it were genuine news to me.

The girl seemed to be so well disposed and unsuspicious of the trouble I was bringing upon her master's house, that I could not refrain from making sure of one point that had vexed me all night.

"Is Mr. Roger Marske staying here?" I asked her.

"Oh no, miss," was the prompt reply. "He arrived last night, but he didn't stop more than an hour. One of the grooms drove him to Brentwood, but as it was too late for the last train he must have stayed there."

How glad I was that I had not insisted on going to Brentwood too. I might have come across the fugitive, and one narrow escape from the hands of Mr. Roger Marske was enough for a lifetime, I told myself.

At ten o'clock the same girl returned to say that the carriage was at the door, and that Sir Gideon was waiting for me, if I would be so good as to go down to him. I found my host in the great oak-paneled hall, his gaunt shoulders swathed in a plaid in spite of the summer heat. His face looked drawn and haggard, as though the night had been an unquiet vigil for him, but his manner as he advanced to meet me was firmer and more assured than during the momentous interview of the previous evening. I was glad that he did not attempt to shake hands. I was in the mood to be suspicious of undue friendliness or familiarity.

"I trust that my people have made you comfortable," he said. "Ah, that is well. Then, if you are ready, we will start, for we have a long drive before us."

Under the portico a barouche, having the hood closed and drawn by a fine pair of bays, was waiting with a powdered coachman on the box and a powdered footman with his hand on the door-knob. I could not help thinking gaily that my vindication of Arthur bade fair to be a triumphal progress, but I was recalled to more sober reflections when Sir Gideon followed me in, taking the opposite seat, as far from me as possible. He preserved a rigid silence till we were clear of the lodge gates, then leaned suddenly forward and said—

"Beyond the immediate purpose in view, you and I have nothing in common between us. You will not expect me to do violence to my feelings by keeping up the pretense of polite conversation. The subject that is most in our minds I decline to discuss."

"I should prefer not to talk, but I think that you owe it to me to tell me where we are going," I replied.

"I have not the least objection to that," he made answer, his lips twitching strangely. "It seems from what my son told me last night that he was secretly married to Captain Rivington's sister. They spent some time together on a yacht, which is now lying in the Victoria Docks. We are going there to see the captain of the vessel, who is in a position to prove the connection—also, that my son parted from his wife after a serious quarrel."

I have been informed since that it is very doubtful,

if I had succeeded in obtaining Sir Gideon's glibly promised "proof," whether it would have been strong enough of itself to convict Roger Marske of the two murders, or even to snatch Arthur from the executioner should he be discovered. But in my ignorant vanity I thought that I had achieved so much that I had as good as achieved all, and I sat back, content with the explanation.

During the eighteen-mile drive we exchanged no further words, but I had plenty of food for thought in Sir Gideon's disclosure. Roger Marske's courtship of Lady Muriel shed a lurid light on his reason for killing Clara, and Mrs. Rivington too, if the latter was aware of the secret marriage. I could see it all so clearly, and so, no doubt, would the jury before whom Roger Marske would be tried. It was the old story of a clandestine marriage, of speedy repentance on the part of the husband, and of lapse into crime when more material advantage offered in a better match.

It was past noon when the handsome equipage, after astonishing the smoky East End streets, drew up at the dock gates. I was conscious of a subtle change in Sir Gideon's manner directly we alighted. Once or twice during the silent drive I had caught his eye fixed on me in stealthily malevolent, but instantly removed, contemplation. Now, for the benefit of coachman and footman and casual bystanders, I believe, he was the chivalrous old gentleman and the distinguished statesman being paternally civil to a girl not socially his equal, but whom it was his whim to befriend. But it was

all done very cleverly, almost in dumb show, without gush.

Just as I have wondered what that nice maid at Marske Hall had been told about me, so I have wondered what reason the powdered coachman and the elegant footman had been led to attribute to my sudden appearance at their master's house and to that long drive. I have never been able to ascertain.

"You will find some place where you can rest and bait the horses, Capps. I may be an hour—possibly two," said Sir Gideon. "Now," he added, turning to me with a little catchy laugh, "we will go and search for this wonderful vessel."

Having proceeded so far in my task I was not going to turn back now, but as I passed through the dock gates at his side a recurrence of my fear of him seized me with almost overmastering power. Intuitively, though without definite understanding, I may have noticed at that moment what I was only too well able to account for afterwards—that in the presence of others he never addressed me by my name. Indeed, when we were unobserved he spoke it in low whispers.

We traversed several of the quays, my companion scrutinizing the bow of each vessel as we passed, and then, with an impatient gesture, he stopped and spoke to one of the dock officials.

"Can you tell me," he said, "where I shall find a steamship called the *Nightshade*?"

"Next turning to the left—second berth in Number 2 Basin," the man replied. Sir Gideon mumbled his thanks and was hurrying on, but the official called after him the gratuitous information: "Her

skipper has applied for his papers. She clears this evening, unexpected, I've heard."

Sir Gideon did not appear to appreciate this communicativeness, for he growled something about "meddlesome fellow," and directed my attention into a new channel by requesting me to look out for the name of the vessel. Like so many of the apparent trifles that centered round me that day his assiduity in glossing over the approaching and unexpected departure of the *Nightshade* did not strike me till later—when, in fact, it was too late.

My younger eyes were the first to discover the name of the ship we were looking for, and it was hard to reconcile her appearance with Sir Gideon's description of her as a yacht. Her low, black hull, with here and there patches of rusty plates, her dingy funnel and untidy deck, gave her more the semblance of a trading coaster or of a small tramp steamer. In pointing her out to Sir Gideon I nearly mentioned the discrepancy, but I checked myself, deeming it hardly worth while to split such a straw as that. What did it matter to me how she was described, so long as the proofs of Arthur's innocence were to be obtained on her? What matter, when by interviewing the captain, I could secure the needed evidence?

"We will go on board at once," said Sir Gideon curtly, and, suiting the action to the word, he crossed the plank connecting the dock with the gangway. Following in his wake, I had just set foot on the deck when a short, strongly-built man, wearing a cap with a tarnished band, but no other sign of his calling, came out of the chart-room under the bridge. His

face was the most terrible I have ever looked upon—a whole history of drink and ungoverned passions.

"What the h— are you la-di-das doing aboard my ship?" he yelled. "Mistaken me for the P. and O. mailboat, I reckon. Well, be jolly quick in clearing off the *Nightshade*. We don't want any blooming toffs here."

My companion drew himself up with a great show of dignity. "I am Sir Gideon Marske," he said.

"The bloke that taxes us? Come to think of it, I've seen your ugly mug in the comics, or somewhere," retorted the captain of the *Nightshade*. "If I had you out in the open sea I'd ropes-end you, and, by G— I'll do it in dock if you don't skip from my little hooker."

"I am here at the instance of a Mr. Danvers Crane, whom I think you know," said Sir Gideon, preserving his temper so completely that somehow I gained the impression that a false note rang in these exchanges. It was like the premature playing of a badly-rehearsed comedy.

The man in the amphibious garments placed a great fleshy forefinger to his sensual lips, and affected to consider. "Ah," he ejaculated. "Circumstances alter cases. I remember Mr. Danvers Crane—right as Moses. A nice chap, free with the spondulics he was. Why might Mr. Danvers Crane have sent you to me? There ain't no mistake, is there? I'm Captain Belcher, I am—the skipper of this craft."

"Then you are the person we want," said Sir Gideon, making a half-turn to me as though appealing for courtesy by including a lady in the business.

"The matter is very urgent and very private, and you will be an—er—gainer by rendering us every assistance in your power. Is there—have you no place where we can converse——"

"On the strict q. t.? Of course there is. As there seems to be profit in it, you'd better step down into the cuddy," replied Belcher roughly, but still with that curious perfunctoriness of tone suggesting the playing of a part allotted at short notice and imperfectly learned. I ought to have been warned by it, and should have been, perhaps, if it had been any one's else affair. As it was I was blind and deaf to everything but the immediate prospect of procuring from this brutal ruffian the details of Roger Marske's guilt, and I descended the steps into the evil-smelling den below, heedless of my danger.

If I had known then, as I do now, that Sir Gideon Marske was quite as deeply implicated as his son in the complex events depending on the vindication of Arthur, how different it would all have been.

The cuddy, or main cabin, of the *Nightshade* was an apartment some eighteen feet long by ten in width, having a table running down the center and the stem of a mast piercing it at the end furthest from the stairs. It was lighted by a smoke-grimed skylight. On each side were the doors of three sleeping berths. The atmosphere reeked with the odors of rank tobacco, fiery spirits, greasy meat, and damp clothes.

So much I had been able to observe when Sir Gideon, who had preceded me down the stairs, cleared his throat and glanced a little nervously at Belcher.

"The—er—air is rather oppressive down here, captain," he said. "And the discussion upon which you will enter with this lady would be painful to me. I think I should prefer to return to the deck till—till you have finished the—er—negotiations."

"Right you are, governor. The young miss and I will soon come to terms, I'll warrant," replied Belcher. And he followed Sir Gideon to the foot of the stairs, as if, with a new-born politeness, to show him the way out. I stood by the table, watching the gaunt back and sloping shoulders of the old man as he climbed to the deck, and I was just wondering whether the pair had not exchanged a whispered confidence, when chaos swooped upon me.

Several of the cabin doors on either side of the cuddy were burst open, I was seized by violent hands, something acrid was pressed to my face, and the rest was blank.

CHAPTER XXVI

"SEALED ORDERS"

HOW long I lay unconscious I know not, but, when I began to recover, my first sensation was that of motion. I was lying down, and the thing I lay on was swaying slightly to and fro. In my ears there buzzed a muffled metallic vibration.

Then, as my heavy eyes roamed wildly round the cramped space, all that had happened came back to me in a flash, and I knew that I was in one of the sleeping-berths of the *Nightshade*, and that the *Nightshade* was no longer in the dock. The vibration was caused by the pulsing of her engines. She was steaming slowly in open water. The voyage had begun, and I was a prisoner on board her—bound whither?

The shock of my awakening was so horrible that the full significance of my detention on the vessel only came to me by degrees. But when I tried the plan of carrying my mind back to the day before, they were degrees that followed each other quickly, and appalling enough I found them. That steady throb of the steamer's screw sounded like a death knell, for I guessed all too surely that I was the victim of a deliberate plot to get me out of the way of launching ruin on Roger Marske.

How I regretted not having trusted the instinct which, the moment I crossed the threshold of the library at Marske Hall, had bidden me beware of Sir Gideon. Apart from the danger-signal in his somber eyes and hawk-like features, I might have known that no good man could have bred a Roger Marske. I saw now too clearly how I had underestimated the enormous catastrophe that I represented to one in Sir Gideon's position. There was more than paternal affection and family pride at stake here. There was the loss of high office, there was the overthrow of ambition, there was the downfall of a public career entailed, as well as the stigma of having a son branded as a murderer; and between all these consequences and absolute immunity, was interposed only the frail barrier of a girl's life. In my ignorance I was, perhaps happily, unable then to throw into the enormous balance against me, the discovery of the Alphington plot, which would become imminent directly Arthur was a free agent. Yet with but partial retrospection I could gauge their motives.

I could picture to myself now, so easy is it to be wise after the event, the interview between father and son while I nibbled those treacherous biscuits in the library. Sir Gideon could have wasted very little time in upbraiding. Having ascertained from Roger the one paramount fact of his guilt, he must have at once faced the problem of how to silence me. He knew well that if he returned to me with an indignant denial I should take my information elsewhere. To admit the accusation, feign the deepest concern for his son's impending fate, and keep me in his power,

with promises of assistance on the morrow, was the only course open to him.

And with what subtlety had he adopted it. I remembered how the crafty old man had appealed to my mercy, dressing up his prayer in the guise of a bargain, and suggesting that if I did not perform my part and allow Roger the chance of escape, the promised proofs would be withheld and the admission repudiated. It was plain to me now that the younger Marske had utilized the start his wily father had gained for him, not in flight, but in preparing the trap into which I had fallen. It was plain enough now, how desperately I had been imposed upon.

That the brutal captain of the *Nightshade* had any knowledge of Arthur's unfortunate sister, or had ever sailed with Roger Marske on a yacht, was extremely improbable. Belcher did not look like a man who would ever be entrusted with the command of a yacht. However, by the light of what had befallen me at his hands, that was immaterial. Doubtless Roger Marske, or maybe Sir Gideon himself, had had previous dealings with him, and knew that he would be an unscrupulous instrument for conveying me—where?

All these recollections and forebodings rushed at lightning speed through my clearing brain, and with an effort I staggered to my feet and looked about me. The place I was in was a small cabin, with two sleeping bunks, on the lower of which I had slept out my drugged sleep. I saw with a thrill of apprehension that the bedclothes were fairly clean, nor was this inconsistent. On such a vessel as this cleanliness suggested preparation and design, and there were infinite

possibilities in the designs of such people as had hold of me.

One step brought me to the door, which, of course, was locked, and I turned to the circular port-hole. It was closed, but had I been able to open it, it would have been useless for purposes of escape, for it was too small to admit the passage of my head, to say nothing of my body. It offered this advantage, though, that it gave me a view of the outside world, and enabled me to calculate the time that had elapsed since I had come on board. My watch had already told me that it was half-past five, but that might mean anything.

The sun was rising from a bank of haze, between which and the ship, at a considerable distance, a long line of low-lying mud-flats was visible. I was able to conclude, therefore, with tolerable accuracy that it was early morning, and that the steamer was somewhere in the lower reaches of the Thames, heading for the open sea. The discovery destroyed my last hope of deliverance through the simple feminine expedient of using my lungs, and doubtless the anæsthetic had been timed for that. I might have screamed with success while the *Nightshade* was in dock; out here in the broad waterway my voice, lifted to its fullest compass, would never reach a passing vessel from the muffled seclusion of the closed-up cabin.

And as I gazed with wistful longing at the far-off shore through the plate-glass circle, the steamer bore to the right, the land fell away quickly, and minute by minute the waves ran higher. I knew that we

were out of the river, standing down Channel on a southerly course for the Straits of Dover, and this knowledge filled me with anguish.

Vessels passed us in plenty, from heavily-laden barges to huge inward-bound ocean liners, but none so near that even had I been on deck could I have made my distress known on board them. For a few minutes that seemed interminable, I was cruelly tantalized by a small craft that suddenly swooped down quite close, and set my heart beating by lowering a boat. My excitement grew into positive pain when the boat pulled straight toward my floating prison, and at the same time the *Nightshade* slowed down and nearly stopped. I guessed what was happening. The pilot, my last link with freedom, was about to be put off. In my semi-dazed condition I had forgotten all about him, and now, in the frantic hope that he would hear, I cried aloud when it was too late.

Too late, because I was either heard by Belcher, or he had divined that I might make this last effort, for my voice was immediately drowned by the rush of escaping steam. The order had evidently been given to relieve the pressure on the safety-valve, with the result that my cries could not have been audible on deck amid the hideous din. I drummed on the port-hole to try and attract the attention of the two men in the pilot-cutter's boat, but they were busy with their oars in the choppy sea, and the boat shot under our stern and was lost to view. Then came the sharp "ting-ting" of the engine-room bell, and the *Nightshade* forged ahead again. The pilot had descended on the other side, and I was a prey to black despair as

I saw the cutter go curtseying toward the boat a hundred yards in our wake.

I think that the tears would have come then, had I not been distracted by a loud knock at the cabin door —a superfluous attention that I appreciated vaguely, seeing that the door was locked on the outside, and that it was open to any one to enter.

"Ahoy there, missy. Now you've done singing you'll be wanting some breakfast, eh?" came the husky tones of Captain Belcher's voice.

I decided rapidly that, as I was at the man's mercy and in complete ignorance of his intentions toward me, there was nothing to be gained by open defiance or a display of temper. Woman's wit had served me as a poor weapon so far, but it remained my only one. I would pin such little faith as was left in me to it still.

"How soon will breakfast be ready?" I asked, striving to make the question sound as indifferent as if I were addressing the steward of an Atlantic mailboat.

My apparent complacence must have astonished him, for a blasphemous but not unfriendly oath prefaced the reply: "Now you're talking sense. The coffee'll be hot as soon as you want it, and—your door's unlocked."

The truth of the latter statement, evidenced by the scrooping of the key, emboldened me to put the question:

"I wish you would tell me where you are bound for, Captain Belcher. I cannot pretend to feel very comfortable till I know that."

The rasping laugh that met my request for en-

lightenment was not reassuring. "There you have me, missy," replied the captain. "You may believe me or not, but I know no more than you do, and shan't till we've passed the Straits. We're sailing man-o'-war fashion this trip—under sealed orders."

"Very well," I said. "I shall be quite ready for breakfast in ten minutes. Am I to have it in here?"

"Not you," thundered through the cabin door. "You're to have it along of me—here in the cuddy. And you'll find me a first-class ladies' man, I warn you."

CHAPTER XXVII

OPENING THE ENVELOPE

THE prospect of sitting down to breakfast with the captain of the *Nightshade* gained nothing in attractiveness from his self-description as a ladies' man, but to undergo the ordeal seemed the wisest policy. Rudeness and foul-mouthed speech I might have to put up with, but it was possible that by feigning a stupid apathy I might avoid the brutal violence of which he seemed capable.

And there would be more scope for seizing any opportunity that might occur if I availed myself of the run of the ship, than if I sulked in the stifling cabin. At the same moment I impressed upon myself the necessity of not overdoing the assumption of studied carelessness, for I shrewdly suspected that in Captain Belcher's crude animalism there was a large proportion of native cunning. His reception of Sir Gideon Marske as an unexpected stranger, in order to lead up to my inveiglement down the companion, had shown that he himself could play a part with success.

When I emerged from the cabin into the cuddy, I found the captain already seated at the end of the

table, and it was a relief to see that the meal was not to be eaten *tête-à-tête*. The place on his left was occupied by a sheepish-looking man with an enormous shock of red hair, whom I afterward discovered to be the mate. There was also a Portuguese steward in attendance, to encourage me with the proverb that there is safety in numbers, though I should have been very loth to meet any one of the three men in a country lane on a dark night.

At my entrance Belcher looked me over with a bold stare, and pointed to the seat on his right.

"Now then, Antonio, you black swab, bacon and eggs for the passenger," he roared at the steward. "O'Brien," turning to the mate, "just trot out your company manners before a lady. If I catch you shoving your knife into your ugly mouth again so long as this blooming cuddy is a first-class saloon, I'll send you to grub forrard, along of the crew. I hope you slept well, miss?"

The leer with which he accompanied the impudent question discounted its rough humor, and I had much ado to keep from breaking down at the start.

"At any rate, I slept very soundly, but perhaps the less we say about that the better," I nerved myself to reply, trying to make a pretense of eating in spite of the nausea with which the rank stuffiness of the place nearly overcame me.

For some reason my answer, with its suggestion of a modified playfulness, pleased the captain, and he laughed boisterously.

"Funny thing, when you come to think of it," he said, "a Chancellor of the Exchequer going in for

tempting a poor honest sailor-man into the smuggling trade. Spends all his time hindering contraband, and then goes into the business himself. Makes a difference, I reckon, when it's outward-bound smuggling, and the goods is a pretty girl."

"Did Sir Gideon Marske leave any message for me?" I asked, ignoring his coarse reference to my forcible detention on board.

"Not a word, unless it's in a certain little envelope he gave me—the sealed orders I spoke of, and not to be opened till we're past Brighton," replied the captain. And again he broke into a noisy guffaw, which only died away when he found it necessary to wipe his mouth on his coat-sleeve. "See here," he went on, "do you know what was making me laugh? It was the way that starchy old cove was trying to look like a chap that's given a blind beggar sixpence as he walked off along the dock. A pious fraud, he is, missy, but he's my paymaster, and a good 'un, so don't you try to run athwart my hawse."

The scowl that accompanied the concluding words constituted them a threat, and I parried the thrust by shaking my head in silly fashion, as though I did not understand. Captain Belcher appeared to be satisfied with my submissiveness, and presently rose and signed to the mate to follow him up to the deck. At the foot of the companion he halted and looked round at me. The expression on his face was a leer and a smirk combined. It horrified me.

"Go where you like on the ship," he said. "Or out of it, if you prefer to jump overboard," he added with a hideous grin. "From what your distinguished

patron let drop, I reckon he wouldn't blame me for such an accident."

I could well understand that Sir Gideon Marske would be delighted to hear that there was an end of me, and I quite expected that the "sealed orders" which Captain Belcher was to open later in the day contained instructions which would change the ruffian's bullying good-humor to a more dangerous mood. That he was utterly unscrupulous, as well as under the thumb of the Marskes, and well paid by them for his present job, was painfully obvious.

And when a little later, taking advantage of his permission, I went on deck, I had no doubt that the crew had been selected with an eye to unquestioning subservience to his orders, no matter what they might be. A more hangdog set of cut-throats surely could not have been collected in the purlieus of any seaport in the world. For the credit of my country, I was glad to find that the round dozen of them, with the exception of a drunken Scotch engineer and the semi-imbecile Irish mate, were all foreigners—Spaniards, Greeks, and Lascars.

The haze that I had noticed earlier in the morning had all rolled away, and the August sun beat fiercely out of a brassy sky as the *Nightshade* ploughed her way down Channel. Either her engines were not capable of any great speed or Captain Belcher was in no hurry, for it was noon before we passed Dungeness, and I knew that it would be quite late in the afternoon before we arrived off Brighton, and the fateful missive in Belcher's possession was opened.

Dinner was served at one o'clock, under the same

conditions as breakfast, with the disquieting difference that the captain had evidently been drinking during the morning. In fact, I had seen Antonio, the steward, paying frequent visits to the bridge with a black bottle and a glass. The effect of Belcher's potations was in one way satisfactory, inasmuch as he was morosely silent, devouring his food greedily and scowling at the red-headed mate, to whom he seemed to have taken a dislike.

He only addressed me once, and that was when he was rising from the table. Tapping the breast-pocket of his coat, he looked down at me as he spoke in a bemused sort of way.

"You're wondering what's in the sealed orders, eh?" he said. "Well, so am I. What d'you say to opening it now? That giddy old Gideon'll never know. Take time by the forelock, eh?"

"You must, of course, do as you like," I replied. "But from my experience of Sir Gideon Marske, I should imagine that you would find it more advisable to wait till the time he appointed. He has a knack of finding out things."

Captain Belcher's answer was a horrible frown at being crossed, but he thought better of it and went on deck without any further proposal to forestall his orders, and my object, which was *time*, was gained. I was in no haste to have that loathsome creature in full possession of Sir Gideon's wishes as to my disposal; and that moment, when Belcher was in a state of drunken surliness, seemed the last one to choose.

Nevertheless, afraid though I was of him, I was reluctant to abandon all hope of escape by remaining

below, so after a while I ventured on deck again, and all through the hot afternoon prayed that one of the many white-winged yachts flitting hither and thither might approach within hail. But I soon became aware that Captain Belcher had no intention of permitting any such chance to be accorded to me. The vessel was steered from the bridge, and whenever she was in the vicinity of other craft the captain would take the wheel from the helmsman and edge further away. Once, when a smart yawl luffed so rapidly as to bring her tearing at racing speed toward us, he caught my eye and made a motion with his hand as though I should look behind me. I did so, and with difficulty choked down a scream. Crouching below the level of the bulwalks, so as to be invisible from the yacht, and within two feet of me, was one of the swarthy Spaniards, with a long keen blade poised straight at my back.

I understood the menacing dumb-show, and allowed the yawl, with her deckload of laughing girls and spruce young men, to shoot under our counter without raising the cry for help that had been quivering on my lips. The Spaniard sneaked away from me, showing his teeth in a cruel snarl, while on the bridge Belcher chuckled audibly. After that I gave up all interest in passing vessels, and sadly watched the green coast line of Sussex slipping by.

It was about six o'clock when Belcher came down from the bridge and pointed to rows of windows and roofs glistening in the sun two miles away across the calm sea.

"That's Brighton," he said with grim significance.

"I know that. I can make out the Pavilion and the pier," I answered, summoning all my fortitude.

"Well, then, here goes for the sealed orders," he continued, producing an envelope from the inside pocket of the tweed coat that made him look more like a country station-master than a sailor. "You'll bear me out, next time you see Sir Gideon, that I didn't start on it before he was ready. Now for the surprise packet."

He tore the envelope open and eagerly perused the closely-written sheet of notepaper it contained. As he read his brows puckered, and once or twice he looked up at me with such a sinister expression that I felt inclined to take him at his word and end my troubles by leaping into the sea. Only the thought deterred me that on my slender chance of escape depended Arthur's liberty and life. Having read to the end, the captain emitted a low whistle and replaced the document in his pocket, again glancing strangely at me.

"Now you can tell me where you are going to put me ashore," I faltered, for at that moment I failed to preserve a bold front before what I saw in the man's eyes.

"Put you ashore?" he repeated, with a diabolical sneer. "You'd best get that out of your mind at once, missy, for there's a long trip—a very long trip —ahead of you. It rests with you, seemingly from what's writ here, *quite* how long it's to be, but you're to settle that with the other passenger that's coming aboard to-morrow. He's to have a say in the business, it appears, and after that *I* come in."

With which enigmatic utterance he returned to the bridge, and I noticed that immediately afterward the steamer's course was slightly altered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DEATH-WARRANT—OR WORSE?

CAPTAIN BELCHER'S horrible words left me rooted to the spot, so charged were they with hideous meaning. Who was the other passenger expected to join the ship on the morrow? What was it that I was to "settle" with him? Naturally my fears reverted to Roger Marske, and the prospect of being again at the mercy of the man who had nearly succeeded in burning me to death at the Mill House was appalling. But still more so was Belcher's concluding sentence: "After that *I* come in." A whole world of terrible possibilities was wrapped up in that simple phrase.

I was consumed with an overwhelming desire to know the worst, and that could only be done by somehow obtaining a sight of the paper in Captain Belcher's pocket. The perusal of it seemed to have created a demand for his favorite stimulant, for Antonio was climbing the bridge ladder with the black bottle and glass. The spectacle inspired me with an idea. If only the captain would get incapably drunk, I might achieve my purpose in time to be prepared

for what was coming on the morrow. I was thankful for that brief respite.

For the present, in spite of his potations, Captain Belcher was very far from being incapable. He had taken the wheel himself, and his dirty fingers clutched the spokes and twirled it with no uncertain grasp. Gradually the steamer edged nearer and nearer to the Sussex shore, and, passing close to Selsea Bill, bore round toward Hayling Island and the narrow entrance to the series of lonely creeks that is dignified with the inappropriate name of Chichester Harbor. I had once spent a summer holiday sketching at that artists' paradise, Bosham, and knew the locality well.

In the gathering dusk the *Nightshade* slipped into the opening, and, with a man taking soundings every minute, threaded her way through several winding creeks till the shores on either hand hemmed us in without sign of an outlet. We seemed to be steaming in the middle of a cornfield ripening for the sickle. Occasionally we hugged the land so close that the trees nearly brushed our masts, and then, suddenly, we came to broader water and cast anchor in a sort of lagoon opposite a ruined custom-house, long since disused. I had a picture of it somewhere, painted in happier days.

Save for the *Nightshade,* that bend of the creek was devoid of craft of any kind. It is very seldom that a steamer enters those land-locked labyrinthine waters, and the few sailing coasters that pass through them seek anchorage still further inland, at Bosham or Chichester. A more secluded spot for a vessel bound on a nefarious enterprise to await a mysterious pas-

senger could not have been found in the British Isles. Out of sight of all ocean traffic, and even invisible from the beats of coastguards, the steamer would have no prying eyes to observe her; for the fishermen of Bosham and Chichester, passing to and from the open sea, were not likely to indulge in more than idle speculation, if they troubled about the matter at all.

When the ship had swung to her anchor on the fast ebbing tide, Captain Belcher came down from the bridge, and his appearance on deck was the signal for me to beat a hasty retreat below. His condition by this time precluded all possibility of my sitting down to another meal with him in the cuddy, and, darting through it into my own cabin, I shut the door and set my foot against it. In a few minutes my heart was set thumping by Belcher's voice outside.

"Come out, missy, and have some grub," he shouted.

"Thank you, I do not need anything. I have a bad headache and wish to lie down," I replied.

"That be d—d for a yarn. May as well be civil first as last. Come on out, or I'll open the door and fetch you," bellowed the captain.

Then I shot a bow at a venture, hating myself the while for invoking the aid of that unknown expected passenger, who might be bringing greater terror upon me than this blatant ruffian wielded. "The person mentioned in Sir Gideon Marske's instructions will know how to deal with you if you attempt any such outrage," I made answer, clenching my hands to keep the *tremolo* from my voice.

Whether I succeeded in that or not, the hint was

effective for the moment, though his manner of yielding added to my apprehensions for the future.

"All right, my beauty, have it your own way to-night. I'll tame you when my turn comes," he yelled through the door.

His lurch to the table was followed by the clatter of crockery and by oaths directed at Antonio, the steward, and O'Brien, the mate. My imaginary headache would have fared badly had it been a real one, such a din of wrangling assailed my ears from the noisome feeding-place of those wild beasts outside, but I hailed their rowdiness with gladness. As their speech grew thicker and the quarrelsome mood changed to maudlin incoherence I had greater hope of getting a peep at the no longer sealed orders.

Presently a request by Belcher shed a ray of light on the relations subsisting between Captain Belcher and his second in command.

"Tip us a song, old shipmate," he yelled. "You used to tune up like a nightingale, that voyage in the South Seas, when we chucked the blackbirds overboard before we were overhauled by that cursed gunboat. Two hundred niggers walking into the briny on the starboard side of the old schooner, while a smug lieutenant in a launch full of blue-jackets was sweating toward the port gangway. Lordy, but that was a squeak."

"If it hadn't been for you bashing some of the last ones on the head as they jumped, there'd have been things alongside to tell tales," sniggered the mate.

From what I could make of their jargon, they had

been engaged together formerly in the illicit coolie traffic in the Pacific, and had murdered their cargo to prevent detection by an English man-of-war. Such were the men who, at the instance of Sir Gideon Marske, were charged with the task of silencing a weak girl. Truly my prospect of saving Arthur and, incidentally, of exposing the plot against Lord Alphington, was of the slightest. And my own case? I tried to put all thought of it from me, praying that my own end might be no worse than that of the poor coolies whom Belcher had killed in cold blood far away in the southern seas.

The Irishman sang a couple of atrocious ditties that sent my fingers to my tingling ears, and then the tinkle of glass, the blasphemous orders to the steward, and finally the swinish snores of the pair told me that the orgie was complete.

For some time I heard the pid-pad of Antonio's feet as he hurried about, collecting bottles and glasses and tidying up the scene of the debauch. Then the sound of his footsteps mounting the ladder reached me, and I knew that there was a clear field for my attempt to learn my fate if I could summon up courage to venture forth.

Acting on the principle that suspense is often worse than the reality, I only waited long enough to be sure that the steward was not going to return, and then I softly opened my cabin door. The swing lamp in the cuddy shone on just such a scene as I had anticipated and hoped for. Belcher lay upon the floor breathing heavily, his purple face upturned to the ceiling, while the mate's head had fallen forward on

to the table and rested on his grimy hands. Both men were sleeping the sound slumber of intoxication, and I stole forward into the reeking air of the cuddy.

Mastering the loathing I felt at having to touch the beast, I stooped over Belcher and quickly extracted the envelope from his breast-pocket. On the half-sheet of notepaper which it contained, written in a crabbed hand, and almost undecipherable by the murky light of the cuddy lamp, were the following words:—

"Rendezvous, Chichester Harbor, off old Custom House. Thursday night watch clump of trees left of creek from ten o'clock. A lantern waved three times will mean that you are to send a boat to that spot to fetch some one who will come aboard and make terms with the girl. You will be guided by his instructions, whether he elects to remain on board and sail with you or not. But if the lantern is waved six times, or in the event of its not being waved at all before midnight, you will at once steam away and act as you please with the girl, provided that she is not heard of again."

This was Wednesday night, I reflected, as I stole back to my cabin after restoring the envelope and its mystical contents to the drunken man's pocket. I had a little over twenty-four hours before I should be called on to face the alternative foreshadowed in Sir Gideon Marske's "sealed orders."

"I Quickly Extracted the Envelope."
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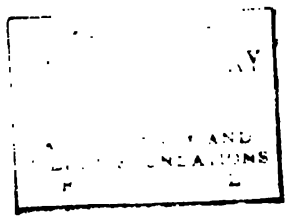


CHAPTER XXIX

WAVING THE LANTERN

I PASS over the slow agony of that night, and of the following day, which, so far as its actual events were concerned, was an improvement on the preceding one. For, presumably with the prospect of serious work in the evening, Captain Belcher kept himself fairly sober, and the sour-visaged Antonio had quite a holiday from bottle-carrying. Still pleading indisposition, I received a surly assent from the captain to take my meals on deck, and so escaped the ordeal of his society in the cuddy.

I think, too, that he was apprehensive, now that he had slept off the effects of his debauch, of what Sir Gideon Marske's emissary might have to say to any premature ill-usage of me, for he seldom addressed me as he lounged about the deck, and then only in curt monosyllables such as, "Fine day," or "Fresh breeze." But the glances which I sometimes surprised cast by him in my direction made me tremble for what would come if "the girl would not make terms," and I was handed over to him to act "as he pleased, provided I was never heard of again."

And now, as the dusk of evening fell on the silent, land-locked creek, and the cormorants that had been fishing in the shallows winged their flight homeward, I leaned over the bulwarks and gazed at the clump of trees indicated in the "sealed orders." Whether the latter were actually penned by Sir Gideon Marske or by his son, they showed an intimacy of acquaintance with the locality which suggested that Roger Marske was their real author. I knew that he had spent much of his idle life in yachting on the south coast, and I had once heard him describing the peculiarities of this series of tidal lagoons to Lady Muriel.

The remembrance of that staunch friend and ally sent my thoughts flying back to the pretty Isle of Wight village, and set me wondering, as indeed I had never ceased to wonder, what had happened and was happening to my poor Arthur. Had he succeeded in prolonging his deception of that mysterious Herzog that he was a willing instrument against Lord Alphington? And, if so, had he so far escaped the still graver peril of being identified as the fugitive from Winchester Jail? Above all, had Roger Marske, now that he was free from my pursuit, used his knowledge to put the authorities on Arthur's track and effect his recapture?

I hardly thought that he would dare to go that length, greatly as it would be to the interest of his own safety to have the sentence of the court carried out. For he would guess that Arthur was aware of the reason of my journey to London, and, if re-arrested, would make an accusation against him which,

though probably ineffectual, would at least be awkward.

If the worst had come to the worst, and Arthur had been driven to his last defenses, I could only pray that my dear hunted lover had confided in Lady Muriel, in whose sweet sympathy I had alone found comfort during the past sad weeks. And if she, in turn, would call in the aid of that nice boy Ralph Carden, the alliance might prove too strong for the enemy. I knew that Muriel and Ralph had a secret understanding, and that the honest young soldier would have been my friend's accepted lover long ago but for Lord Alphington's blind prejudice in favor of the son of his colleague, Sir Gideon.

I was recalled from these hopes and fears by the sudden approach of Captain Belcher, who had come up from the cuddy after his evening meal. Though his sobriety was ominous of trouble ahead, I was thankful for the moment that he had not repeated the indulgence of the previous night. There was still, however, that disquieting stare in his evil eyes—a stare to make a defenseless woman's blood run cold.

"Nice fine night, ain't it, missy? Hope you've been enjoying it," he said, comprehending the peaceful ripple of the creek and the darkening landscape beyond with a sweep of the hand that had "bashed the niggers" as they were driven overboard to drown.

"I have been enjoying the quiet," I replied shortly.

"Ah, you're getting at me over the racket last night," he chuckled. "The ships that Bill Belcher commands ain't exactly Sunday Schools, as you'll find out when the trip is a little older. What I was

driving at was that you can't enjoy the night up here any longer. Things will be humming on deck presently, and I must trouble you to go below to your cabin."

"Certainly, I have no desire to stay," I replied, and moved away to the companion-ladder, pausing there for a moment to take a last look round. The captain was climbing to the bridge, doubtless to watch for the signal from the shore; smoke was beginning to issue from the funnel from the fires which had been banked up all day, and the villainous crew were clustering forward. The signs pointed to preparation for departure, and I descended to my cabin, glad that its position would enable me to see the signal. The port-hole faced the clump of trees whence presently would be spelt out the message that meant so much to me. Belcher, in his ignorance that I had perused his instructions, would not know that I was on guard.

It was nearly ten o'clock, and any time after the hour the lantern might be waved—three times to denote the advent of the person who was to make terms with me, and six times if the *Nightshade* was to steam away with Belcher as the arbiter of my fate. If the waver of the lantern elected to come on board as a passenger, who would he prove to be? Who else could it be but Roger Marske? And what mischief had he been wreaking since he had arranged with Belcher for my reception after his pretended flight from Marske Hall? My heart misgave me lest he should have employed the interval in hounding Arthur down, for if he had not had some villainous work to do he

could have sailed from the docks, without the necessity for this out-of-the-way rendezvous.

The night was fine, with a three-quarter moon rising in a placid sky, so that the larger objects on shore were plainly outlined. Stationing myself at the port-hole, I kept my eyes fixed on the dark group of elms, which, I had ascertained in the daytime, grew nearly down to the water's edge, and which now, as the slow minutes passed and the moon rose higher, stood out in clear-cut relief. But the moon being behind the trees, the narrow strip of land between them and the creek was in darkness, and strain my eyes as I would I could not penetrate the gloom sufficiently to have distinguished a human figure there. I should have to possess my soul in patience till the new arrival reached the steamer before clearing up the all-important question of his identity.

Eleven o'clock passed without the signal being made, and I began to fear that the third alternative provided for in Belcher's instructions would become operative. If the lantern were not waved at all by midnight he was to take it as equivalent to the six waves and steam away, thenceforward having sole control of my fate. How that control would be exercised did not bear thinking of.

And then suddenly, as my watch told me that it was twenty minutes to twelve, I thought that I detected a flicker of light, as of a match being struck among the trees. I waited breathlessly, knowing that the supreme crisis had come, yet undecided, in my ignorance of who was lighting the lantern, whether I wanted the three flashes or six. If it was Roger

Marske out there among the trees I should be in bad case either way, and Roger Marske it must be for certain.

Intense silence had reigned on deck for the last hour, showing that Belcher and the crew were watching for the signal, but now a hoarse cry from above showed that the sailors' eyes were as sharp as mine. The flicker grew into a steady flame, which, carried by unseen hands, advanced to the water's edge and waved:

Once. From right to left.

Twice. From left to right.

Thrice. From right to left again.

Ah me! Would there be a fourth and a fifth and a sixth? Would that horrid pendulum go on or cease? My beating heart and aching eyes waited for the answer—a lifetime, it seemed, but in reality only for the second that it took the wielder of the lantern to blow it out.

For at the third wave the signal ceased, and I knew that he who was to "make terms" with me was coming aboard. Almost simultaneously Belcher's hoarse order to lower a boat was heard, and a minute later the splash of oars told that Sir Gideon's instructions were being obeyed. Then the boat shot into view and pulled across the moonlit creek straight for the clump of trees. I gave my eyes no rest when it disappeared into the shadows of the shore, for I think that in the course of my life I have never gazed so eagerly and yet so fearfully as when I watched for that boat's return.

It came at last, gliding from the darkness into the

shimmering ripple of the tideway, and I saw at once, when she was still a hundred yards off, that she contained a man in addition to the two rowers. He was sitting in the stern, but, with the light behind him, it was impossible to recognize his features at that distance. I could understand that Belcher overhead was peering as eagerly as I, since he had not been enlightened in his instructions as to the visitor's identity.

And then, as the boat approached the steamer and rounded-to to come alongside, my suspense was ended and my bewilderment increased. The man in the stern was not Roger Marske at all. A moonbeam fell full on his face and showed him to be that terrible Herzog, who, with such deadly intent, had contrived Arthur's escape from prison.

CHAPTER XXX

HERZOG FACES BOTH WAYS

THE advent of Herzog was utterly inexplicable to me. What could there be in common between the ruthless conspirator who desired the death of the Prime Minister, and a member of Lord Alphington's Cabinet? Yet I had seen it written, if not by Sir Gideon Marske himself, at any rate with his knowledge, that the person who would join the ship in that lonely arm of the sea would do so with his approval, charged with the business of making terms with me. Which surely must point to collusion between Sir Gideon and Herzog.

In such a tangled maze speculation was idle, and I listened intently for the reception of Herzog by Captain Belcher. It was of supreme interest to learn whether the two men who held my fate in the balance were previously acquainted with each other. Much might depend on that.

The boat rasped along the steamer's side, and I heard the "flop" of the rope accommodation ladder as it was flung down for the newcomer to climb on board. There followed the plethoric breathing of a stout man exerting himself, and a moment later Cap-

tain Belcher's husky tones reached me in the exclamation—

"By golly, then you ain't the cove I took you for. I expected the old boy's son—Mr. Roger Marske."

"I come as Mr. Roger Marske's substitute. He has been unfortunately detained, but I have full powers to treat with the lady," came Herzog's reply, plainly heard in the still night air. And then, as they moved away from the side, the conversation tailed off into unintelligible murmurs, to become almost immediately audible again as host and guest descended the companion into the cuddy. I was sorry to have missed the gap in their talk, for they seemed to have struck a point of difference already.

"I can't do it," Belcher was saying. "You're so jolly late that the tide has ebbed too far for me to take her out till morning. Besides, I'm tired of waiting, and want a drink. Here, Antonio, you black swab, bring glasses."

"I shall be delighted to join you, captain, but if you cannot get away to the open sea to-night, I must insist on your weighing anchor and dropping down into the next creek," came the answer in the voice I remembered hearing on the promenade at Totland on the day when Arthur revealed himself to me in Herzog's company.

"Insist is a word I ain't in the habit of listening to on my own ship," growled Belcher.

"My dear sir—my dear friend, if you will allow me to call you so—we are both in the same swim, and I can assure you that it is necessary to our mutual interests that the ship should be moved, if only round

the next bend, for to-night," said Herzog suavely but firmly. "I do not want to have to rub it in that I am representing Mr. Roger Marske—with full powers, mind you."

There was a pause, during which I could imagine the disputants looking into each other's eyes for the mastery, and then came the surly submission from Belcher: "It's gospel true, what I'm telling you about the tide, but I'll up anchor and try and work her into the next creek. Like as not she'll ground on the mud."

I heard the captain ascend the ladder to the deck, and I was listening to his orders to the crew, when I became conscious of a faint drumming on the door of my cabin. "Miss Chilmark," came a cautiously muffled summons through the panel. For a moment I hesitated to reply.

"What is it?" I demanded, puzzled by the apparent desire for secrecy.

"Will you not open to me for a moment? There is a vital question to be settled between us before the captain returns. My name is Herzog—a friend of Captain Rivington, and therefore your friend also. I am here to extricate you from what I believe to be very grave peril."

A friend of Captain Rivington indeed—the man who held him in thrall for the commission of a crime that would have staggered the world! Was it not natural that I should regard his overtures as rank treachery, designed to enmesh me further in the toils of the Marskes? Why, only a minute ago I had heard him claim to represent Roger Marske on board.

I laughed bitterly as I answered, not even troubling to moderate my voice.

"Truly a strange blend of friendships, when you are here as my friend and Captain Rivington's friend, and also on behalf of Roger Marske, who is the cause of my detention."

"For God's sake, not so loud," came the throaty appeal through the door. "I said that to hoodwink Belcher. Roger Marske is lying unconscious in yonder clump of trees, stunned by a blow from my stick so that I might come on board alone."

"I cannot believe that, after what Captain Rivington told me of you," I replied firmly, reluctant though I was to reject the glimmer of hope that ran thrilling through my veins. Herzog's statement, I persuaded myself, was certainly false, but at any rate it had given me an exquisite sensation for the fraction of a second. Roger Marske stunned and prevented from coming aboard. It was too good to be true, even if he had been laid low by this unscrupulous schemer.

And then Herzog sprang upon me a more powerful inducement. "Look here, Miss Chilmark, won't this move you?" came his appeal. "I have been in Roger Marske's flat in London to-day, and I there procured proofs, sure and incontestable, that he murdered Captain Rivington's mother and sister. There are reasons why I cannot present them to the authorities myself. I want to concert measures for doing so through you, and also for getting you off this very dangerous ship."

I could resist no longer. It might be all lies—all the cleverer perhaps because they tallied with the

truth which I myself had learned—but where else could I look for help? I opened the cabin door just a little, and was confronted by the perspiring face of the man who had held Arthur's destiny, and now, it seemed, held mine, in his grasp. He looked as if he had suffered physical discomfort and exertion unusual to him, but his eyes fastened on me like searchlights. At that moment the engines throbbed and the steamer began to move.

"Good!" he ejaculated, turning to listen, and facing me again. "There would be no chance for us if the ship was in the creek and within hail when that fox comes to. Now I know that you have no cause to be prepossessed in my favor, but will you give me a concise account of what has happened to you since you left Totland to get evidence against Roger Marske? I want to fit it in with what I have discovered, so that I may know how to present the case. We have five minutes, probably, before the captain works the steamer into the next bend and returns to the cuddy."

He spoke rapidly and with intense earnestness, but how could I judge of the value to me of his excitement? He had carried out to the letter the programme laid down in the "sealed orders" handed by Sir Gideon to Belcher, and the chances were more in favor of his being in Sir Gideon's service than in Arthur's and mine. I regarded his story as a ruse, to obtain from me the measure of my discoveries before deciding how to deal with me.

"What is the nature of the evidence you procured in Roger Marske's flat—merely circumstantial or

some material object?" I asked, willing to temporize in spite of my doubts of him.

My question provoked a sly look of real or pretended admiration. "Really you are a most wonderful young lady," he said. "A female mind that can discriminate between circumstantial and direct evidence is a jewel beyond price. It enhances my regret that I must decline to confide in you till you have confided in me. My personal safety depends upon what you have experienced and discovered since you encountered Sir Gideon Marske. I cannot speak till I am fully informed."

"Then, as I cannot trust you, you will not have to speak at all," I said.

He muttered something impatiently, advanced a step nearer, but instantly resumed his polite demeanor when I began to shut the cabin door in his face.

"Let me plead with you for all you hold most dear —for your lover's life," he urged. "If these proofs which I hold are not forthcoming by to-morrow night at latest, Arthur Rivington will be taken and hanged. Roger Marske in London to-day laid information with the Home Secretary that the fugitive was at Totland Bay, and I have reason to believe that the place will be turned upside down in order to find him. No chance will be given him for explanation. He will be executed the moment they get him back to jail."

It was a terrible choice to be called upon to make. If I refused Herzog's advances I might be condemning Arthur to death; on the other hand, if I accepted them, I might be placing a fresh weapon in the hands of my enemies.

But the choice was no longer mine to make. I had dallied too long, for the heavy tread of Captain Belcher on the first step of the companion ladder warned me to close the door softly. At the same time Herzog stepped swiftly back into the cuddy with a ready greeting for his host on his lips.

"You have managed it all right then, captain?" he said. "If you could go one better and reach the open sea to-night it would be another hundred in your pocket over the job. I am authorized to act as paymaster in any special emergency."

"Can't be done for any amount of spondulicks," replied Belcher, evidently, however, impressed if not mollified by the monetary offer. "The tide has been too quick for us, and you've been too slow. If those lubbers don't drop anchor in ten seconds, we'll touch bottom. I should have stayed to see the order carried out, but for this raging thirst. Ah, there she goes."

The cable rattled, the engines reversed for half a minute, and I knew that the *Nightshade* had taken up her new quarters till the tide should serve again. If only I could be sure that the move had been made lest Roger Marske should see the steamer on recovering from the blow which Herzog alleged that he had dealt him, how happy I should have been. How I would have exercised all my poor wits to make another opportunity of speaking with Herzog again before he slept.

As it was, the conversation which ensued between him and Belcher left me in doubt whether I had acted for the best or worst. My fears for Arthur and the self-distrust born of my many blunders inclined me

to take the latter view, but all my feminine instinct for a man false to the very core of an evil heart swayed me to the other. Did not I know that Herzog was a consummate actor, a finished liar, and a conniver at assassination? For all that, there was something in his personality that made me yearn to be sure that my interests and his were really identical. With that assurance I should be confident of victory, and, above all, his eyes inscrutable, sly, full of changing expression as they were, never looked at a woman as Captain Belcher's did.

And yet, when the bottles and glasses began to clink in the cuddy, the words he spoke were so callous, so brutal, that my only consolation was that he might be playing a part for the deception of Belcher, and possibly for the purpose of inducing me to confide in him. All the captain's talk was directed at ascertaining what probability there was of my being left on board at his disposal. Herzog, while parrying all direct questions, discussed me as though I had been a bale of goods.

"Come!" he said at last; "show me where I can turn in for a little sleep. I cannot make any definite arrangements about the girl till I have seen her in the morning. If she is wise, you will have to put us both ashore in the Isle of Wight; if she is a fool I shall land alone, and you can take her to the devil."

"Then I'm all right for a jolly trip," hiccoughed Belcher. "There ain't no question but what the wench is a fool, and I don't care if she's listening t'other side of that door to hear me say so. It's me that'll preach sense into her presently."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PROOFS OF GUILT

ALL that short but sleepless night I spent in making up my mind and undoing it again as to the course I should pursue, always trying to put Arthur's safety before me as the one goal to be attained, without reference to my own peril.

It all narrowed down to this—that Herzog's story *might* be true, in which case by preserving silence I should defeat my own ends and ruin Arthur's only chance; whereas, if it were not true, I could not do him more harm than by allowing myself to be carried out to sea by Belcher, with all my discoveries rendered futile forever. For the commencement of such an unspeakable voyage would mean my death. I was resolved to cast myself overboard the moment the last chance of going ashore had disappeared.

By the time I had arrived at the ultimate conclusion to trust Herzog day was breaking, and, no restriction having been placed upon me, I stole up on deck. How welcome was the breath of the fresh morning breeze on my fevered cheeks after wrestling with that awful problem in the stuffy six-foot cabin. The new anchorage occupied by the steamer was

flanked on the windward side by a huge meadow of late clover, the scent of which came over the creek, and, blending with the salt air, formed a tonic perfume, exhilarating with new life.

New life did I say? I had hardly emerged from the hood of the companion, when I was reminded that I had more to do with death than life that day. Physical enjoyment of God's free sky and sea was not for me. The red-headed Irish mate, lounging on the bridge, sprang to instant vigilance, eyeing me with a furtive grin. Half-a-dozen fierce faces raised themselves from the deck forward, where a contingent of the foreign crew were lying in a picturesque group that, in happier conditions, I should have loved to paint.

Evidently the *Nightshade* was keeping strict anchor-watch for a merchant vessel lying in the peaceful seclusion of a land-locked estuary.

I went to the side and leaned over, gazing over the gray foreground to the green and gold of the fields beyond. If I had been a man, unhampered by clinging garments, I would have at least attempted to make a dash for the shore.

"Wondering whether you could swim the distance, Miss Chilmark?" said a low voice at my ear. It was Herzog, who, on hearing me astir, had come up from below with cat-like tread. His whole attitude, rather than his words, suggested that it was on the larger issue that he required an answer. To that point I addressed myself, ignoring his strange divination of my thoughts.

"I have decided to accept your story as true," I

said. "Which means that I am willing to tell you all that passed between Sir Gideon Marske and myself."

"That is well," he replied gravely. "Come to the stern—behind the wheel-house. There is not a moment to be lost, and we must not be overheard."

In less than five minutes he was acquainted with all my adventures, from Roger Marske's tracking me to Mrs. Webley's shop, down to my long drive from Marske Hall to the docks in Sir Gideon's company, and the ruse by which I was induced to go below into the cuddy. Herzog's manner of receiving my narrative was instructive. He heard of my danger in the burning Mill House quite impassively, but he showed keen interest in Mrs. Webley's behavior and in all that passed at Marske Hall.

"You have had some narrow escapes, and have been among some very unkind people, young lady," was his comment. "You are, I presume, under the impression that the newsvendor woman gave you the right address, where Clara Rivington wrote to Roger Marske, when she sent you to the Mill House?"

"At the time I thought so, though I was puzzled when I learned at Chipping Wyvern that the Mill House had been so long unoccupied," I replied.

Herzog laughed and fumbled for a cigar. "The excellent Mrs. Webley," he proceeded as he struck a match, "sent you to the Mill House because, during your absence from her shop, Roger Marske slipped in and paid her to do so. Being on his father's estate, he knew of it as a solitary house, where he would be able to bring you and your pursuit of him to an untimely end. Roger Marske really received his un-

acknowledged wife's letters at his rooms in Jermyn Street, with the 'Danvers Crane' envelopes covered by fresh ones re-addressed by Mrs. Webley. On one occasion, however, that mendacious female made a fatal slip in merely crossing out the 'Danvers Crane' and re-addressing the same envelope."

"How do you know that?" I gasped.

I suspect that this extraordinary man always had an eye for dramatic effect. Striking something of an attitude, he produced a package from his breast pocket. He fondled the packet a moment, then presented it for my inspection.

"Because there are the letters," he said, holding them out to me. "I was not left alone in Roger Marske's chambers yesterday for nothing."

"Am I to take them?" I faltered, unnerved by his sudden action.

"Certainly. Within limits I am a man of my word," he smiled. "You have satisfied me that Marske can be convicted without my being compromised in another little excursion into crime by that gifted family, so I keep my promise. But I have more for you. Take care of that box, Miss Chilmark, for in conjunction with the letters it will remove the rope from the neck of the interesting young man with whom it has been my privilege to associate, and will place it round that of as big a scoundrel as ever deserved hanging. I speak dispassionately, as one who lays no claim to probity for its own sake."

The object which he now extracted from his voluminous pocket and proffered for my acceptance was a chocolate box, tied with a faded pink ribbon and dec-

orated with the gaudy picture of a lady of preternatural beauty.

"The comfits in that box," he explained, "are identical with those with which Roger Marske poisoned Mrs. Rivington and her daughter, sending them to his victims through the post. The box also contains correspondence from a certain Italian chemist from whom they were procured. It speaks for itself, and is sufficiently clear to convict the recipient of murderous intentions. You hold in your hands about as complete a case as a prosecuting counsel could desire."

"What am I to do with these things?" I asked, overwhelmed by the success which, beyond my wildest hopes, seemed to be crowning my efforts.

"Verify them first if you like, though I should advise your concealing them about your person at once, in case of interruption," was the reply.

Herzog nodded approval when I took the latter course, and after first taking the precaution to glance round each corner of the wheel-house along the deck, he laid his smooth, fat hand impressively on my arm.

"Now please pay particular attention to me while I sketch out your future course," he went on. "I place no restrictions on you, but I have rendered you a service which I am sure that you will do your best to repay. There are reasons, vital to my own safety, why, as Herzog, I should not appear in the matter at all. Are you willing to keep me out of it?"

"If you will show me how it can be done," I answered, readily understanding his motive. Had he not been the prime mover in, if not the original insti-

gator of, the plot against Lord Alphington, with which Arthur's escape from Winchester was inseparably bound up?

He must have read my thoughts. "I have no objection to be known in the business under my *alias* of Doctor Barrables," he said. "Captain Rivington has consented to repay my service by sinking all reference to Herzog, and it was to ascertain from you if Sir Gideon had said or done anything which would make it necessary to drag me into his son's case that I was obliged to stipulate for your confidence before handing you those proofs. What I propose is this. As Roger Marske's supposed representative I shall bid Captain Belcher put you ashore at Totland Bay. You will go straight to Lord Alphington with the proofs and tell him the whole story exactly as you know it, merely substituting the name of Doctor Barrables wherever you should say Herzog."

"But Roger Marske is aware of your real identity, and will disclose it when brought to bay," I said.

"Not so; as it will not be material to his own defense, there are the best of reasons why he should not disclose it," replied Herzog, with such a meaning smile that light broke in on me, as I believe he intended it should.

"Sir Gideon was the instigator—" I began in an awe-struck whisper, which he checked with a wave of his hand.

"My dear young lady," he purred, "let us draw a veil over all that. I do not even admit that the Prime Minister was ever in any real danger at all. But this I do know—that your lover is, and that

unless we can get round to Totland by the early afternoon he will probably be recaptured, when even those proofs which you hold will be too late to save him. And I am afraid we may have difficulty with the captain. He gives me the impression of having an axe of his own to grind—of wishing to keep you on board."

"I am terrified by him; the first night I spent on the ship he got drunk, and I heard him talking to the mate," I said.

"Well, you heard me talking last night, so you must not be too greatly alarmed," replied Herzog, with a solemn wink. "All the same I agree with you that the man is a hog——"

"Who are you calling a hog on my ship?" came the suspicious inquiry from behind. And, turning quickly, I saw that Captain Belcher was casting baleful glances at us round the corner of the wheel-house.

CHAPTER XXXII

A FIGHT AGAINST TIME

HOW long had Belcher been standing there, and how much had he overheard? I began to tremble violently, but with characteristic readiness Herzog stepped to the front, and, shielding me with his broad person, turned the awkward question aside with a jest. The individual to whom he had applied such a harsh term, he avowed, was the steward Antonio, who had only given him a teacupful of water to wash in.

Belcher scowled and muttered, as though only half believing, but he went on to say that the tide served, and to inquire whether Herzog wanted to be put ashore at that point, or whether he was going on in the steamer.

The question did not elicit an immediate reply, for Herzog capped it with another: "You are bound, in ballast, for Barcelona, I understand from Mr. Marske—to fetch home a cargo of fruit?"

"You've hit it, mister—first time," assented Belcher gruffly.

"Very well, then here is your programme," proceeded Herzog. "I have made terms with this young

lady on behalf of my principals and yours. You will therefore start immediately, and, shaping your course inside the Isle of Wight at your best speed, you will land Miss Chilmark in one of your own boats at the pier at Totland Bay. I myself shall enjoy the pleasure of your company considerably longer, captain, for I propose to go on with you to Barcelona."

Belcher had been staring at him open-mouthed, but now his jaw closed with an ugly snap, and he seemed on the point of an angry outbreak. I had been thinking of Arthur and Arthur's safety hitherto, but now I was free to rejoice at the near prospect of escape from this wild animal's domain. His visible disappointment at that moment brought home to me how doubly grateful I ought to be for Herzog's intervention. Had I been the passenger to make the voyage I could see that the waves would have been my best friends before we were out of the Channel. So I told myself in the exaltation of the moment, without reflecting that as long as I was on board the *Nightshade* such congratulations might be premature.

Belcher for the present restrained his wrath, and, muttering that he would go and get the anchor up, turned on his heel and went forward to the bridge. Shortly the steamer began to move, and as she crept slowly from creek to creek out to the open sea, Herzog filled in the blanks of his narrative.

He told me how Roger Marske had attempted to murder Arthur; how, fearing that, as he had failed to silence my lover by that direct method, Marske would take measures to have him recaptured, he, Herzog, had hidden him in a vacant house and had

started to try to trace me and procure evidence against Marske. He had intended to see Arthur again before leaving Totland, to take food to him, but finding that Marske was leaving for London by the first boat he had had to alter his plans in a hurry.

Instead of going in person he had been compelled to trust a local fisherman named Croal with the duty of conveying provisions to Arthur's retreat. The limited confidence he had had to place in this man was disquieting, but he hoped and believed that the man was both stupid and trustworthy, and would not betray the trust. He had enlisted Croal's sympathies by telling him that Arthur was a runaway debtor, and it was hardly likely that the fisherman would connect the case with the fugitive convict who was supposed to be on his way to America. At any rate, it was the best he could do, as it was imperative not to lose sight of Roger Marske. Only by sticking to him could he learn my whereabouts.

With persistent cleverness he had carried out that self-imposed task, traveling up to London in Roger Marske's company. Marske, of course, had heard from him already that Arthur's escape had been arranged by Sir Gideon; and, doubtless, his father, on the memorable night at Marske Hall, had supplemented the information, so that Herzog had no difficulty in approaching the matter. He had therefore informed Roger Marske, what he knew already, that the affair which had caused Arthur's release was at an end, and had gained the villain's confidence by warning him of the charge which I was working to bring against him.

Falling into the trap, but without admitting his guilt, Roger Marske had thereupon disclosed to Herzog what had befallen me—how I had come to Marske Hall, of all places in the world, to lay an information against him, and how advantage had been taken of this to inveigle me on board the *Nightshade*, over whose brutal skipper Sir Gideon had a firm hold. Roger Marske had also fully stated his plans regarding me. He was going down late in the evening to board the ship in Chichester Harbor, when, unless I signed a document withdrawing all aspersions on him, especially as to what had happened at the Mill House, I was to be left on board at Belcher's disposal.

Herzog was of opinion that the *Nightshade's* rendezvous at that lonely spot, unknown even to the captain till after he had sailed, had been chosen against the contingency of Roger Marske having to fly after the desperate effort he meant to make to silence Arthur by violence. The attempt having failed, and Arthur being unable to accuse him of it, he had no reason for flight, and would not have remained on board.

"Then came my masterpiece," added Herzog, with a touch of vanity that was natural to him. "I induced him to consent to take me down with him, so that I might avail myself of the opportunity of keeping out of the way in Spain for a time. I also persuaded him to allow me to wait in his rooms while he went out to give secret information at the Home Office as to the fugitive's whereabouts. The result you know. I successfully ransacked his rooms with the aid of my bunch of skeleton keys, and later on pre-

vented his designs on you with a knock on the head."

"But," I said, fired with instant alarm, "if he was at the Home Office yesterday afternoon the search for Arthur will commence this morning at the latest."

"Not so," was the partially reassuring yet terrifying reply. "The object of the Marskes, and certain other interested persons, is to allow as little time as possible to elapse between his capture and execution —to minimize the remote chance of any one's paying attention to what he would say. It was arranged, so Marske told me, that he would not be looked up till the afternoon, so that he might be hustled off to Winchester in the evening and hanged at dawn to-morrow. You should take comfort from the fact that they believe him to be still in the lodgings at 'Springthorpe.' I took care to impress that fiction upon Master Roger. They do not know that their quarry is hidden away in an empty house, and that a hunt is in store for them."

I could only hope for the best, and pray that the sleuth-hounds of the law would believe my dear one to have fled further afield, when they learned that he had not been seen at his lodgings for nearly two days. But Herzog's concise story made me realize how everything depended on the *Nightshade* for the next few hours. A hundred things might happen to cause a fatal delay. Her rattletrap engines might break down; her captain might get drunk and rebellious; ominous clouds, heralded by a spiteful breeze, were banking in the western sky. The

weather might upset all Herzog's calculations and send Arthur to his doom.

Antonio came presently to announce that breakfast awaited us in the cuddy, and before going below I was rejoiced to see that we should soon be out of those lonely stretches of stagnant water. The steamer was threading her way between the low shores of the most seaward creek, with the sandy beach of Hayling Island visible on the port bow. Once clear of the shallows Captain Belcher could put on full speed if he so willed it.

He did not appear at the breakfast table, the honors being done in surly fashion by the red-headed mate, who eyed Herzog askance, and obstinately refused all information as to how long it would take to do the distance to Totland Bay. "You must ask old man Belcher," was his oft-repeated answer. "He don't permit the likes of me to do the talking on his ship."

When we returned to the deck it became evident that the captain's abstemiousness in the matter of food did not extend to liquid refreshment. He had been supplied on the bridge with a square flask of Hollands, to which he frequently applied himself in the intervals of giving instructions to the man at the wheel. His face was already flushed, and his speech, as he bellowed foul-mouthed orders to the crew, was thick and inarticulate.

"We shall have trouble," I heard Herzog mutter. "The fellow is fortifying himself for a purpose."

And turning to me, he added aloud, but in a low voice, "It is asking a good deal of you in the way

of swallowing noxious air, Miss Chilmark, but I really think that you would be better in your cabin—for the present, at any rate."

"Thank you, I shall remain on deck," I replied in a tone intended to be final.

Herzog's shrug and grimace denoted that he accepted it as much. "Then," said he, "let us entrench ourselves to the best advantage. Ah, the very place."

He led the way to a small deck-house, built at the side of the vessel, flush with the bulwarks and about ten paces aft of the bridge. There was a similar structure opposite on the other side, and I was told afterward that the signal flags were kept in one of these houses and spare ropes in the other. Herzog's use for the one he selected was soon to be made plain.

"Now, if you will kindly stand there, you ought to be all right," he said, indicating the angle which the deck-house made with the bulwarks—a spot where I was entirely screened from a view of the bridge, and could see nothing of the ship but the afterpart of the deck, with the house for the second wheel, behind which we had conversed earlier in the morning, in the background. Herzog came and leaned over the rail beside me, taking advantage for the moment of the same shelter. His keen gaze was directed at the rough water of the open sea ahead, into which the steamer was steadily ploughing. Already we were beginning to pitch uncomfortably.

My strange companion pointed to a blue line that rose at a great distance in front of us as the steamer wore round to the left, clear of Hayling Island.

"It is a very little matter—simply the difference between inside and outside—that is worrying me," said he. "Those are the cliffs of Bembridge, in the Isle of Wight. If Belcher steers for them we shall know that he is for going outside the Wight, straight-away down Channel for Spain, instead of shaping a course inside it, down the Solent, according to orders. Which will mean that he has kicked over the traces, and that there are squalls ahead in two senses, for it is going to blow a summer gale by all the signs. The elements we cannot control, but we shall know all about the Belcher part of the programme in less than two minutes."

His words filled me with a new despair, just as I had thought the battle won. Alarming as would be the prospect for myself if Belcher elected to run out to sea and commence his voyage without putting me ashore at Totland, for my poor hunted Arthur the result could only be the supreme disaster. I waited with my heart in my mouth for the first indication of the course to be steered, and it came quickly enough. Disdaining the narrow waters between the Isle of Wight and the Hampshire coast, the vessel's head swerved further to the left, leaving no doubt that Belcher was making for the English Channel, south of the Island. We were not intended to pass the flourishing little watering-place on the Solent at all.

Gently but firmly Herzog pushed me further behind the shelter of the deck-house, at the same time drawing a formidable revolver.

"It is not likely that the captain will have fire-

arms on him, but I want you to be out of harm's way in case there is shooting," he explained. Then he stood boldly forth and leveled his pistol at the bridge.

"If you do not alter your course, and run for the Solent inside thirty seconds, Belcher, I will drill a hole through you," he cried.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SHIPWRECK

THE thirty seconds allowed in Herzog's challenge seemed to have been multiplied by ten before there was any result. I could not but admire the attitude of my unscrupulous ally during that period of suspense. His aim never wavered, nor did he show the slightest apprehension for his personal safety, great as were the odds he had taken upon himself to confront. I tried to read upon his face signs of what was passing on the, to me, invisible bridge, but his expression remained sternly impassive.

The answer of the enemy came at last, not in a bullet, but in a string of oaths that the intervening deck-house failed to keep from my ears. And with the answer came relief, for almost simultaneously the *Nightshade's* bows wore round for the other course —that between the mainland and the Wight.

Herzog did not lower his revolver, but after a reassuring nod at me he addressed himself to Belcher.

"I give you credit for that act of wisdom, captain," he shouted. "You and your crew have nothing to fear from me so long as you obey orders. But I shall

shoot any man who attempts to come aft of the bridge, and I shall shoot *you* and put the mate in charge if you don't keep up a good speed—ten knots at least."

Another volley of blasphemy flew back harmless, but the vesssel plodded on to the westward in the teeth of the fast rising gale, and Herzog took no notice. But he did not relax his readiness with the pistol.

"I am afraid that, for a stout man who loves his ease, I have taken on rather a large order," he half turned his head to say to me. "At the mildest computation we cannot be off Totland for another three hours, and I must keep watch and ward all that time on a deck that bids fair to become slippery. Luckily, my legs are fairly seaworthy. Before I became a Surveyor of Taxes I had the honor to care for her late Majesty's revenue as an exciseman in Belfast Harbor."

So, for the next hour, as the vessel ploughed into the narrowing waters of the Solent, past Southsea and the Spithead forts on the right, and the green slopes of the Wight, shadowed now by lowering storm clouds on the left, my unexpected champion chatted frivolously. But all the while his eye was full of vigilance for the bridge, and once or twice a sudden stiffening of the fingers on the stock of his weapon told of movements among the crew beyond my field of vision. Once he raised the pistol, but lowered it again with a laugh.

"Belcher has finished his bottle and wants another," he explained for my benefit. "Unfortunately for that unquenchable thirst of his it would

have entailed a visit by Antonio to the cuddy, which is in our domain, and that I could not permit. What a stroke of luck, Miss Chilmark, that our friend the skipper believed himself such an autocrat that he didn't think it necessary to carry his pistol on his person. If he had done so my vigil might have been more lively, and less of a sinecure."

As the steamer edged further into the Solent, our chief foe for the moment, the weather, had its flank turned by the island barrier, and we steamed past East Cowes, with its anchorage full of sheltering yachts, in less discomfort. Still the wind and the waves were against us, and the old fruit tramp made but poor time. It was past noon when we were off the mouth of Southampton Water, and then something happened.

Herzog preserved his original position at the corner of the deck-house, with his pistol in hand poised ready for use, and with his gaze focused on the forepart of the ship, which I could not see. I myself was impatiently watching the island shores, and thinking how slowly they seemed to slip by, when a yacht, anchored inshore off West Cowes, attracted my attention. She was a pretty schooner, with auxiliary steam power, and I thought I recognized her as one which had been lying at Totland a fortnight before. In order to prolong my scrutiny of the yacht, when we had passed, my eyes turned further astern, and in doing so encountered a sight which drew from me a warning cry.

Two of the *Nightshade's* foreign cut-throats were peering round the corner of the aft wheel-house.

They were armed with long knives, and were evidently on the point of attacking Herzog from the rear. As he turned at my scream they made their rush, but the moment's warning was enough for that ready hand and brain. Two shots from his revolver rang out in quick succession, and the treacherous ruffians fell, mortally wounded, one on the top of the other.

"Thank you, Miss Chilmark; I could wish for no smarter *aide*," said Herzog, whipping round and covering the bridge again. To my surprise there was another flash and report from his revolver, followed by a howl of rage and pain.

"All right, Belcher; a flesh wound in the calf won't do you any harm," he shouted. "That is only a reminder not to play any more hanky-panky in the way of towing those beauties of yours overboard to scramble over the stern and steal a march on me. If it occurs again I shall make it a capital offense for you as well as for them, and shoot to kill you."

With which he slipped three fresh cartridges into the smoking cylinder, and turned his broad smiling face on me.

"I am taming him by degrees," he chuckled. "But I fear that I shall have to alter my plans and take the risk of going ashore at Totland with you. A voyage to Barcelona, under the strained conditions subsisting between our good Belcher and myself, would not be a pleasure trip."

"But," said I, "if Arthur has been recaptured, and has told his story, mentioning you as 'Doctor Barrables,' you would be recognized as his late companion and arrested, would you not?"

"That, my dear young lady, is the risk that I must run," replied Herzog cheerfully. "I regard it as a lesser one than traveling to Spain with the truculent gentleman who is now binding up his leg on the bridge, and who would certainly murder me unless I could do without sleep for ten days. We should be off Totland in an hour now, and I do not believe that Captain Rivington will have been molested so early. It is not as though he were at our old lodgings, remember. He is a recluse where he will take a lot of finding. No, I prefer the risk of going ashore, and of dropping quietly off to more congenial haunts till such time as there is less chance of Herzog, the Government agent, being identified with the Doctor Barrables of what will probably be a big line in modern history."

His words were cheering, not only on Arthur's account, but because I could not help feeling interested in the strange man who had so unexpectedly dropped from the skies to befriend me in the last stage of my "forlorn hope." He was so secretive, with all his air of frank geniality, that I could not divine whether he had really entered into the plot against Lord Alphington with the intention of working it out to the bitter end. When I am puzzled about this I always remember that speech of his:

"I do not admit that the Prime Minister was ever in any real danger at all."

And that is the view I prefer to take—that Herzog, with the iron heel of Sir Gideon Marske on him, did as he was bid in the matter of arranging Arthur's escape from prison, but that he did it in the hope that,

before the desperate venture was ended, he would find some means of turning the tables on his master, or at least of freeing himself from his yoke.

I looked at his strong face, with the humorous twist to a mouth that suggested possibilities of cruelty and tenderness at the same time. I was clutching the railings, so heavily was the steamer pitching now, but the stout elderly gentleman, fingering his pistol, with one keen eye for the bridge and a milder one for me, balanced himself on the heaving deck with no apparent effort. He had lit and smoked some half-dozen cigars since we occupied what he called our entrenchment.

"Have you no relatives to miss you if you leave England?" a sudden impulse prompted me to ask.

Just then something on the bridge, which I could not see, made him steady his revolver for a moment, but, whatever the emergency, it passed, and he flung at me a look of quite fatherly kindness.

"No," he replied. "I have no one to mind, whatever happens. I had once—a young wife, of whom I was more than fond, Miss Chilmark. It was to save her life by sending her to Madeira that I committed the theft—no need to mince words—which brought me into bondage under Sir Gideon Marske. My wife died, and I became the unwilling slave of a man more infamous than any of those who have used place and power for their own ends."

That was the first and last of Herzog's confidences to me, but it is perhaps sufficient to explain why I refuse to regard him as the human monster whom Arthur has portrayed in the earlier pages of his nar-

rative. For the sake of the strenuous aid he rendered me I try to persuade myself that he went into the affair of Lord Alphington because he guessed that his employers had made an initial blunder in assuming Arthur's guilt, and that instead of closing the conspiracy with a political assassination, he might be able to forge from it a weapon for his own emancipation.

All this time the gale had been increasing, but it was not till we had passed Yarmouth and come into the straight stretch ending in the Needles and the open sea that we felt its full force. And once through the narrow gut, where Cliff End on the Wight and Hurst Castle on the mainland jut out toward each other, the seas were running high. A minute later I was drenched to the skin by a shower of spray, and Herzog voiced the fear that had already seized me. He pointed to Totland pier, foam-besieged and deserted, across a mile of angry water. Away to the right, on the dreaded Shingle Bank, the breakers were leaping with thunderous roar.

"I am afraid we are done," he said. "A boat would scarcely live in that sea, even if my pistol could induce a brace of these ruffians to man it."

"You *must* induce them; I am not afraid to go in a boat," I cried desperately, for the sight of the little tree-embowered village on the cliffs, round which all my hopes and fears centered, maddened me. I could pick out quite clearly the vacant house in which Arthur had sought refuge—one of several stone-built residences above the lifeboat station.

In my agitation I had stepped out beyond the

shelter of the deck-house and joined Herzog on the sloping deck, clutching his arm to save myself from falling. I had not seen Belcher for hours, but now, as I looked up at the bridge he turned his evil face aft at us and shouted maliciously:

"How about going ashore now? You'll have to shoot the whole crowd, for I'll never get 'em to lower a boat in this sea."

Herzog turned to me, his great broad face working with an emotion that I like to think of as pity. "The skipper speaks a true word for once," he said sadly. "But, if you so decide, I am quite willing to give the *Nightshade's* crew the choice between suicide by drowning or bullet."

"What would happen if we do not attempt to land?" I asked in despair.

Herzog shot a glance at the surges boiling on the Shingles. "It will be a perilous operation," he replied, "but I can make him turn back to Yarmouth and land us there, where the roadstead is sheltered. Of course there would be the loss of valuable time, but it would be better than getting drowned or the other alternative of being taken to Barcelona."

"And doing no good at all. Yes, make him go back to Yarmouth," I implored, realizing that to reach Totland pier across that storm-tossed sea was impossible.

Herzog lost no time in transmitting my wishes to Belcher, who, after a moment's sullen hesitation, repeated the order to the steersman. The steamer's bows wore slowly round in a long curve, shipping tons of water as she turned broadside to the tempest, but

there was either not sufficient sea-room to turn in the restricted fairway, or the captain bungled the maneuver, for before the vessel had completed a half circle we were in the breakers, and half a minute later the *Nightshade* struck bottom with a long, rending crash, ominous of her doom.

We were aground on the all-devouring Shingle Bank, a mile and a half from land, in a sea through which nothing but a lifeboat could win to us. And the *Nightshade* heeled over and bumped upon the pebbly bottom, while the leaping, hungry breakers spumed over the bulwarks and threatened to smash the worn-out tramp into matchwood long before a lifeboat could cover the distance.

Herzog's hand closed over my wrist and dragged me further from the side. "Let us try to reach the aft wheel-house," he roared in my ear. "We shall be safer there from being washed overboard—unless the whole house goes."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ROGER MARSKE ARRIVES

HERZOG showed good judgment in selecting the wheel-house as a last refuge from the fury of the breakers. In taking the ground the steamer had partly slid over an outlying spur of the Shingle Bank, and had there become fixed, with the result that her stern was considerably higher out of the water than the bows. The forecastle, indeed, was actually submerged, while we were correspondingly elevated above the level of the tumultuous seas.

The noise of the wind and the waves, and the still more horrible "crunch" of the huge mass of shifting pebbles in which we were jammed, made sustained conversation impossible, but partly in words and partly by gestures Herzog managed to convey to me that our one hope was the lifeboat, if the vessel could resist the tremendous buffeting of the breakers long enough. It seemed more likely that she would part in the middle, the forepart dropping off into deep water to sink like a stone, and the stern breaking into splinters.

The crew swarmed into the rigging of the foremast, except Belcher and the Irish mate, who remained

on the bridge, apparently engaged in a violent altercation. For some minutes this lasted, and then the mate came down and, staggering to the deck-house, behind which I had stood all the morning, brought out a flag, which he hoisted on the main-mast, climbing into the rigging immediately afterward.

Seeing himself deserted by O'Brien, Belcher stood at the bridge rail, apparently hurling unheard curses after the retreating figure of his mate. Then he, too, descended to the deck, trailing his wounded leg down the bridge ladder, and clinging to the foot of it while he gazed apprehensively at Herzog, who stood in the door of the wheel-house at my side. My companion made a sign to the wretched man, at which he showed his teeth in a ghastly grin and literally hurled himself through the clouds of flying foam into the hood over the cuddy stairs. Herzog laughed grimly.

"The liquor!" he shouted in explanation. "Belcher was asking my leave to come aft of the bridge and get it. Wanted the mate to bring it to him. That was what the row was about."

I shuddered, for it was evident that the captain of the *Nightshade*, in his mad craving for drink, had abandoned all chance for life and had gone to face a master more awful even than Sir Gideon Marske—the master whom Sir Gideon himself served so well. The cuddy must have been two feet deep in water when Belcher reached the bottom of the stairs, but had he been able to stand up it would have been equally all over with him a minute later. A giant breaker surged over the side, sweeping the decks from stem to stern, and hurling Herzog back on to

me, clutching wildly for foothold. By God's grace, we both clung to the doorway till the flood sagged out again, but down below the cuddy must have been full of water. The captain had been drowned like a rat in a trap in the foul den which two nights ago, when he had forced me to sup with him, he had called his first-class saloon.

Thence onward all our concern was for the shore, whence alone could come our help. On each side of the wheel-house was a round glazed port-hole, and at the landward one, clinging for dear life to a spoke of the wheel, I stationed myself. Herzog stood in the doorway, and our eyes strained towards the low cliffs of Totland, where we could make out people running to and fro like little black ants. I could understand how the summer visitors would be taking full advantage of such a spectacle as a ship-wreck, which made no demand on their pockets—a gratuitous bit of excitement thrown in, as it were, by kind Providence, for their amusement, without charge.

Ah, if those hurrying sightseers could have known the inner history of that ship-wreck—that bound up with it were an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister! the escape, with which all England was ringing, of a prisoner on the verge of the scaffold; and the proofs of that prisoner's innocence—how their tongues would have wagged as they battled with the gale for points of vantage on cliff and beach.

It was at least a comfort to be certain that we were seen, without undergoing the slow agony of those who are wrecked at night, and know not whether

their signals have been observed on shore. Nor would there be the delay, inseparable from the hours of darkness, in getting the lifeboat crew together. It was too far to distinguish individuals without the aid of glasses, but already we could make out signs of activity round the building where the brave blue and white boat was housed. Little had I thought, when I had watched her at a recent practise, how soon my life and my love, and my lover's life and honor, were to depend upon her prowess.

Herzog came close to me and made a speaking trumpet of his hands. "If Roger Marske has got over the clout I gave him last night, and has returned to Totland, he must be having a bad time," he shouted. "The flag the mate ran up will have told the coastguard the name of the steamer."

"If he is there he is praying for the ship to break up," I replied. "Thank God that Arthur, who must be watching us from that empty house, does not know."

Presently, after what seemed a year, but was in reality about half an hour, a gleam of white shot from the building on the beach, telling us the blessed news that the lifeboat had been launched and was on its way. It was only a fitful view we had of her after the first rush down the slip, so enveloped were we in showers of spindrift, while now and again a huge wave, more hungry than the rest, would break right over us, nearly washing us from our foothold, and plunging the interior of the deck-house in darkness as of night.

"Why, what is it? She is not making for us at

all!" I cried in sudden anguish, as a glimpse of the lifeboat showed her to be steering away from us diagonally—on a course that would take her out to sea. Could it be they were about to give over the attempt to save us?

Herzog gave me a quick glance, and produced a flask from one of his inexhaustible pockets. "Here, take a sip of this," he said almost roughly. "We can't have you breaking down. The lifeboat's all right. She's got to allow for the set of the tide."

His words, rather than the brandy, cheered me, but a minute later I think I owed my life and reason to that timely stimulant. For, with awful swiftness, I was called upon to witness a sight so appalling that I forgot the lessening of my own slender chances which it entailed. Herzog's forecast was verified. The steamer broke in two just aft of the bridge, the whole forepart collapsing into the seething surges, and carrying with it the two masts to which Captain Belcher's villainous crew were clinging. Above the howl of the tempest the one wild shriek of those poor lost souls resounded, and then the wind and the waves resumed their mastery of noise and violence. All that remained of the *Nightshade* was the stern, on which our battered wheel-house was perched.

"We are wedged tight in the shingle; we ought to hold out," was Herzog's only comment, but he belied the curt consolation of his words by the trouble in his eyes. I do not believe that he valued his own life at all, and that the gloom which settled on his usually impassive face was solely on my account. And he became restless, sometimes retaining his old

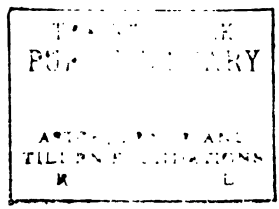
station at the wave-washed door of the wheel-house, and sometimes joining me at the port-hole.

Our position was now doubly precarious, on account of the wreckage with which we were surrounded, and which the sea used as a battering-ram against our frail refuge. The masts, denuded of their fruit of human lives, were tossed by each advancing breaker on to the bank, to be drawn back again by the suck of the backwash. More than once they struck the stern, causing it to tremble like a frightened horse, and though Herzog tried to comfort me by saying that the blows jammed us more firmly, I knew well that if the wheel-house itself were struck it would splinter into matchwood over our heads.

But at last the lifeboat drew near, so buried in blinding spray and in the troughs of the rollers that when she was visible at all she was but a blurred mass, indistinct as to all detail. She appeared first on the windward side, rowing parallel with the bank, in which her coxswain was evidently looking for an open channel, so that he might approach the remnant of the wreck in comparative shelter. And even as the boat passed he seemed to have found it, for she swerved suddenly, and vanished from our sight behind the sternmost end of the wheel-house, in which there was no port-hole to afford a view of her.

"She must have shaved our rudder and propeller," cried Herzog in unwonted excitement. "Come, my dear lady, your troubles will soon be over. She'll round-to and hitch on to us on this side."

He made his way as fast as caution would permit



"They Sprang upon One Another Like Tigers."
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to the other window, and was peering for the reappearance of the lifeboat, when, at a scream from me, he turned and faced the doorway. There, clutching the lintel to prevent himself from being swept away, stood Roger Marske, bareheaded and wearing the cork jacket of a lifeboatman.

The two men blinked at each other in the dim light, as though to be very sure, and then, with one accord and without a word on either side, sprang upon one another like tigers.

'ARTHUR RIVINGTON'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

CHAPTER XXXV

A DOUBTFUL FRIEND

I HAVE to resume the thread of my own personal story at the point where, on the morning of my concealment by Herzog in the vacant house at Totland Bay, I was alarmed by the appearance of a man in a blue guernsey at the window of the drawing-room. It will be remembered that I was expecting Herzog to return with a supply of provisions, and that on drawing aside the blind I saw the stranger instead.

A moment's reflection showed that, as he had undoubtedly seen me before I dropped the window blind, no good could be done by refusing to speak to him. He would probably go and tell every one he met that someone was living in the unoccupied house, with the result that I should be at once routed out by the agents or owner. So I raised the blind, opened the window, and beckoned to him. That I

had made no mistake in doing so was at once made plain by the credentials he presented—a basket of provisions and a note, which proved to be from Herzog.

"My dear friend," it ran, "R. M. is off to London by the first boat, and I must stick to him like a leech. The chase will in all likelihood lead me to that brave little lass of yours. So I send the best substitute I can find at short notice. I should not be disposed to trust him too far, but as all these Isle of Wight fishermen have smuggling blood in them, they have an hereditary antipathy to law and order. This chap has been told that you are an absconding debtor. His name is Peter Croal."

My visitor, when I finished reading, was regarding me out of the corner of his eye with a furtive benevolence that was by no means pleasing. It was as though he approved of me, not from personal attraction, but as a possible source of income. It was the sort of look that a certain class of cabmen bestows on a schoolboy who may be held good for an exorbitant fare.

"I am obliged to you for bringing me these things. Did my friend give you anything for doing so?" I said.

Mr. Peter Croal drew his sleeve across his mouth and looked thirsty. "In a manner of speaking, the gentleman did. Don't he say so in the letter?" was the tentative reply which made me distrust the man there and then.

"He doesn't mention the amount," I said, wishing to draw him out and verify my suspicions.

"Drat him for that!" retorted the fisherman, with a fine show of having been hardly treated. "The gentleman, he give me the money for the grub and liquor, and 'arf a crown for myself. 'But, Croal,' he says, 'that ain't anything like proper remuneration for a kind of secret job like this. I only gives you 'arf-a-crown because it's all the change I've got. I'll put it in this here note as t'other gent is to give you a sovereign.' "

I tendered the sum demanded out of the little store with which Herzog had supplied me in case a wider flight should be necessary, but I did not believe a word of the story. Herzog had, without doubt, adequately paid him, and this was only a try-on to make the most of the bit of luck that had come his way—the thin edge of the wedge of blackmail. If this was the spirit in which Mr. Peter Croal entered upon his trust I could foresee a heavy addition to my existing anxieties. He surely had the blood of a blackmailer and a smuggler in his veins.

Having spat on and pocketed the coin, the fellow showed no disposition to go, nor was I, in my impotent position, able to suggest departure. He leisurely scrutinized the few pictures on the walls, and the furniture, and then his eye, too friendly for safety, traveled slyly back to me again.

"Pretty little place—this you've got here all to yourself, mister. How long might you be going to bide in it?" he inquired.

"Till I choose to leave—or till you give me away,"

I said, hoping to measure his capacity for treachery by the extent of his disclaimer.

And full measure indeed he gave me. Such a plausible, honey-tongued rascal as that Isle of Wight lobster-catcher it has never been my lot to listen to. The catastrophes which he called down from Heaven on him and his if he betrayed me made an appalling catalogue. He had taken a fancy to me, he avowed, the moment I drew aside the blind. He was "always one that stood by the unfortnit."

And then, suddenly, with a sequence of ideas that may or may not have been accidental, he added:

"If you was the bloke that broke jail at Winchester I wouldn't peach, seeing what a liking I've took to ye. Them newspapers say he's got away to America, but you can't believe printed stuff nowadays. Like as not he's laying up, snug and comfortable, in jest such a crib as this."

And Mr. Peter Croal's benevolent gaze roamed round the room again, with one little corner of each mild eye on me, it was made plain later. For the unexpected personality of his remark sent a shiver down my spine, of which I must have given some visible demonstration, though there was nothing to show that I had committed myself in the inconsequence of his next speech. When he had done examining the pictures and the furniture for the second time, he had apparently dismissed all thought of "the bloke who broke jail at Winchester." His ideas were all centered on the weather if his next remark was acceptable proof.

" 'Mazing fine morning, it be, after the storm last

night, though I don't allow as it's settled," was his way of changing the subject.

"You must be glad it's fine, for I have no doubt you are one of the lifeboat crew," I forced myself to say to keep up appearances. I was somehow more afraid of this oily-mouthed Island fisherman than I had been of Herzog, and, Heaven knows, that strange creature had terrors enough for a poor wretch with a rope round his neck.

My allusion to the lifeboat seemed to annoy Mr. Croal, for it called forth the first expression of opinion from him that had a genuine ring in it.

"Lifeboat? Yes, I'm one of the crew right enough," he exclaimed, his face working with swift anger. "But you don't catch me going in her again. They ought to have made me coxswain when the vacancy fell in."

"You have resigned, or are going to resign, then?" I said, not dreaming how real ought to have been the interest which I feigned.

Mr. Croal uttered an ugly laugh. "I shan't do no such foolishness as resigning," he replied bitterly. "I shall wait till there's a wreck, and then let 'em go short-handed. It may come to-day, or it may come a year off, but the time's bound to come when she puts off without Peter Croal and Peter Croal's mate, Bill Spicer. There'll be a fine howdy-do when we don't answer the call."

It was not for me to voice my disgust at his callous selfishness, and I fear he took my silence for approval; for he continued to expatitate on the plight in which the crew would be when deprived, without notice,

of the services of two of the oldest members. Had not my liberty and life been in the fellow's keeping I would have kicked him into the garden and over the cliff.

To my relief, he at last showed signs of going, though he was not to depart without administering another shock to my sorely-tried nerves. Having drawn up the blind, to make his exit by the window through which he had entered, he looked back at me and grinned.

"Might be a chap escaping from jail, eh, mister—using a winder this way when there's doors to the house," he said, watching me narrowly.

"Yes, it is inconvenient, but it will not be for long," I replied, thinking how much safer I could make myself if I were the truculent murderer I was believed to be. For then Mr. Peter Croal would certainly not have left the house alive.

"No offense, mister, I hope?" he persisted, with the same evil leer.

"Offense? No, why should there be?" I returned, with what carelessness I could command.

Then only did he go, giving the gratuitous information as he lurched out into the garden that the wind was backing, and that there would be another blow from the westward before long.

Though glad to be rid of him, I could not hide from myself that my danger of discovery had been increased tenfold by Herzog's employment of this doubtful medium. I could only conclude that my late companion had weighed the matter carefully, and that he preferred this risk for me to letting Roger

Marske run loose. Well, if the course he had taken led him to Janet, I would cheerfully suffer the uneasiness with which Croal's manner had filled me. There was a reward of two hundred pounds offered for my recapture, and this plausible longshoreman was avarice personified. Why did he keep harping on that escape from jail, if his cunning wits had not given him an inkling of the truth?

These doubts and fears worried me throughout the lovely summer day spent behind the drawn blinds of the vacant house, but when twilight began to fall no one had come to disturb my solitude.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DISCOVERY

IN the gathering dusk, strangely enough, my courage rose. The working hours of the day, in which Mr. Peter Croal, if so minded, might have set the sleuth-hounds of the law on my track, were gone, and it was improbable that I should be molested till the morrow. I assured myself that the greedy fisherman had possessed less brains than I had credited him with, and I was glad that I had not yielded to impulse and sought some other refuge.

For there had been minutes during the long day when I should have relieved the strain by fleeing to the woods, or even appropriating a boat on the shore and putting out to sea, had it not been that I should then have lost touch with Herzog and his search for Janet. I cannot, in justice to myself, call that restless longing to be gone cowardice, for, remember, please, I was not avoiding death from fear of the thing itself, but because the death I should have to die if I were taken would be that of a felon—condemned, moreover, for a crime he did not commit.

Wearied with the gloom of living out the anxious

day behind drawn blinds, I mounted to an attic at the top of the house on the seaward side, and seated myself at the window. I dared not open it for a breath of fresh air, but as the blind here was raised, I had a clear view without any risk of being seen in the interior darkness of the room.

The after-glow of a superb sunset was lingering in the west, while in the bay the lights of yachts and pilot-cutters twinkled like fireflies. The clearness of the atmosphere on a night so calm, presaged rain and storm, lending probability to Croal's prediction that the dirty weather would soon be repeated. Though the casement was closed, the tinkle of a banjo came quite clearly to me across the water from one of the yachts, and sometimes voices and careless laughter.

The peaceful scene clashed with my own sad case, and raised in my seared heart fierce rebellion against my lot. I was as guiltless as any of those gay pleasure seekers out yonder, yet here was I, sneaking in holes and corners from my fellowmen—an outcast, cursed the length and breadth of the land, for another's sin. My thoughts flew back for the hundredth time to Herzog and his quest for Janet. Had he found my brave darling, and had she snatched from the peril that must have overtaken her, the proofs that would bring that sin home?

Suddenly all my repining and vague surmise were crystallized into a very present emergency. Among the shrubs in the garden below, half way between the house and the brink of the cliff, stood the motionless figure of a man. It was nearly dark now,

and I could not distinguish his features, or even his style of dress, but from his attitude he seemed to be taking a leisurely survey of the house. I judged the height of the man to be about that of Peter Croal; yet, if it were that smooth-tongued rascal, why should he loiter like that instead of making his presence known?

I do not imagine, though all things are possible, that any one who reads this my narrative has ever been convicted of murder, sentenced to death, made good his escape on the eve of execution, and dodged about the world in the full knowledge that recapture meant the instant carrying out of the sentence. If there be any such I shall have his sympathy when I say that I was frightened by the sight of that motionless, watching figure in the garden. The ordinary reader will probably once more call me a coward. Nor can I find fault if he does.

Again I was the victim of a hundred conjectures, the most salient being that Croal had informed against me and was waiting for the police to procure admission for them. He would perhaps hide them, when they came, in the shrubs down there, and then, under the guise of friendship, induce me to let him in through the drawing-room window, when there would be a rush and all would be over.

But no; that was not the programme; or, if it were, his planning as to ambush had been laid already. For, without being joined by any one else, the watcher advanced toward the house, and as he stepped from the obscurity of the shrubs disclosed the unmistakable glow of a cigar. Mr. Peter Croal's

smoking would assuredly have been done through the medium of a clay pipe.

It was best to be on the spot—to confront this new development at close grips—so, making no noise in case this prowler of the night had only been led by curiosity into the grounds of the empty house, and was unaware of my presence, I groped my way downstairs. As I was entering the drawing-room from the hall, stumbling slightly in the dark on the door-mat, there came a tap at the window, followed by another and another. I stood still, scarcely breathing, and the tapping ceased.

A gravel path ran close to the window, and, after a pause that seemed interminable, I heard the "crunch" of a light footstep. It did not sound like the tread of that clumsy sea-dog Peter Croal. I hoped that the unseen intruder was going away, though why, if he had no knowledge that any one was in the house, he should have come and tapped at the window, I could not attempt to divine.

But there was no repetition of the sound betokening departure. It was merely the impatient shuffling of a foot by some one balked of his purpose. My visitor was still there, as was evidenced by a recurrence of the drumming on the window pane. And then, just as I was crossing the ink-black darkness of the room to open the window and end the suspense, I paused in consternation at the sound of my own name, spoken in no hostile tone:

"Rivington! Are you there, Rivington?"

"Who is it?" I asked, breathless.

"It is I—Ralph Carden. You may safely open to

me. I come as a friend," was the reply which caused me to undo the catch and admit the speaker. He stepped into the darkness of the room, but not before I had caught a glimpse of his face and assured myself that it was really the young officer who had recognized me at Lord Alphington's.

"This will surprise you, after the way I treated you the other night," he said, when I had refastened the window. "The fact is that you really have Lady Muriel to thank for it."

"God bless her!" I rejoined. "What most surprises me is that you should have discovered that I was here."

"It is that that brought me—at Muriel's instance," he replied, going on to explain briefly that Croal was the source of his information.

It appeared that after my sentence, but before my escape, Carden had been out sea-fishing in Croal's boat. All England was then talking of me and of my supposed crime, and, in discussing the trial Carden had mentioned that I had been at Woolwich with him for a short time. That day Croal had come to him and informed him that a man who might be the escaped convict was concealed in the vacant house on the cliff. As he was not sure, and had been paid to supply the mysterious hermit with food, he would be glad if Carden would contrive to get a look at him, so that if he proved to be Rivington he, Croal, might claim the reward. If not, there would be no harm done, and he could go on making a smaller profit by carrying provisions.

"Well," proceeded Carden, "this put me in a

precious awkward position. I *knew* that you *were* Rivington, and guessed that something had occurred to make you go into closer hiding. But I also knew how interested Muriel was in you on account of Miss Chilmark, and how staunchly she believed in your innocence. I—well, the fact is I have reasons for wishing to stand well with Muriel—and I knew she would be furious if I were instrumental in your recapture. So I went straight to her and told her what had happened, at the same time assuring her that there was no mistake about it—that you *are* the man supposed to be nearing America. She is bent on helping you."

"Again God bless her," I said, adding, with an instinct for the real source of danger: "But what of Croal?"

"He is to come to see me to-morrow, when he expects to hear the result of my inspection, if I have been able to obtain one," Carden replied. "If I do as Muriel wishes, I shall have to act the casuist and tell him that I didn't recognize you."

All the time that he had been speaking to me I had been wishing that I could see his face, so as to better judge whether he believed in me himself, or was only inclined to befriend me for Lady Muriel's sake. That he was running a very great personal risk in doing so, entailing far more serious consequences than the wrecking of his professional career, was not to be denied. It was due to him to know all the facts of the case before he ran that risk, and I was also moved to full confidence by a frantic desire to have one solitary human being's sympathy *on the*

merits of the case. Lady Muriel's kindly interest was very sweet and touching, but I could not disguise from myself that it sprang from girlish friendship, and that if she had not known Janet I should never have entered into her thoughts. I craved for something more than sentiment—for the honest belief of an honest man.

"I should not wish you to act against your convictions on my behalf, but you will be better able to judge when you know the secret of my escape from Winchester," I said. "Then, if you choose to espouse my cause, you will at least do so with your eyes open."

And I told him everything, suppressing only, as in honor bound to the man whom I believed to be at the eleventh hour trying to serve me, the true name of Sir Gideon Marske's emissary. In my disclosure Herzog was called "Doctor Barrables," and so, without any slip on my part, he remained to the end. From Ralph Carden's boyish point of view, Herzog did not seem to matter at all. All his ideas ran on Roger Marske, and the implication of him and his father in my life-tragedy.

"By Jove, Rivington!" he exclaimed, as his hand sought and gripped mine in the darkness, "you have convinced me now. I'll be square with you. When I came I was in Muriel's interests alone, but I'm in yours, and in those of that plucky girl of yours, now. What is best to be done? We seem to be in the thick of a business that will set England ablaze. Those blackguard Marskes!"

I am no diplomatist, but I saw that I could have

taken no surer road to Ralph Carden's favor than by disclosing his rival's villainy. Had it not been for the hearty ring in his voice I should have discounted the value of his new-found trust, as being based solely on that rivalry; but there was no mistaking that the young soldier was an honest convert to my innocence —no matter if his hopes for Roger Marske's downfall had fathered the thought. The fact that here was a new ally, gave me comfort.

"But nothing has been proved against either of the Marskes," I pointed out. "Till Janet is found I am the only witness, and I am worse than useless. The moment I stepped out into the open to prefer a charge I should be hanged out of hand. And I could not even hope for *post mortem* rehabilitation, for I cannot expect the man, whom I must continue to call 'Doctor Barrables,' to come forward and implicate himself."

"I was struck by that fellow the other night," said Carden. "He seemed a strong man, but can you be sure that he is running straight in your interests? Is he really likely to produce Miss Chilmark, and any proofs she may have discovered, if he is lucky enough to discover her?"

"I would not trust him an inch unless our interests were identical," I replied. "But as they happen to be so, I could have no more powerful support. I am convinced that the aim of his life is to get the Marskes on the hip, and I have even thought lately that he went into this business not only because he was compelled to, but with that end in view."

There was silence between us in the darkness, and

I did not break it, for I knew that Carden was striving for a way to cut the Gordian knot.

"I give it up," he announced at length. "The first essential seems to be to baffle the inquisitive Croal, but as to the wider issue of how to save you in the event of recapture I am all at sea. If I go with a yarn like this to Lord Alphington, he will think I've been getting it up for Marske."

There was no gainsaying the force of that argument. With the wild improbability of the uncorroborated story, my advocate would start heavily handicapped, but the fact that he was Roger Marske's rival would get him laughed out of court at once.

"I can only suggest," said I, "that you should submit the whole thing to Lady Muriel, and be guided by her. One woman's wit has gone far to help me already, and I am quite willing to trust that of another for this part of the tangle."

"By George, Rivington, but that's the line to take," Carden exclaimed enthusiastically. "I'll be off and try and catch her in the garden at 'Ardmore' to-night. You must buck up, old man. Muriel will pull you through."

But when he had passed out of the window I smiled sadly to myself at the young man's ardor. How much of it was for me, and how much for the sweet collaboration which it entailed? I do not attempt to excuse my bitterness. Not many months before, I myself had gone forth on any pretext to meet my own dear Janet, and now I was a branded fugitive with a price on my neck, and Janet—where was she?

My secret, too—the secret of my hiding-place, that alone stood between me and the gallows—had passed into the keeping of others. Well-affected they might be, and probably were in a silly, romantic, sentimental way, for which I was grateful; but I and my peril had not the first place in their efforts at aid. In Janet's true heart alone was I myself the real reason for a whole-souled sacrifice.

I repeat that I make no apology for this frame of mind, but it was the one in which I flung myself on the couch in the drawing-room of the empty house and snatched a fitful sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PREMIER TAKES SNUFF

I SPENT the morning of the next day in waiting and listening. I was filled with a premonition of impending disaster. I dreaded the advent of Croal, lest I should be unable to control my resentment at his treachery, and I was already apprehensive of the outcome of Lady Muriel's championship. I had hung my life on such a very slender peg—the discretion of an impulsive and affectionate girl. If she had made a slip in the advice she gave to Carden I might be called upon to surrender at any moment.

And if anything were wanting to depress me further the weather was enough to do it. By ten o'clock it was evident that Mr. Peter Croal's meteorological prediction was to be fulfilled. A sudden darkening of the room caused me to go up to peep from the attic window, and I saw that the western sky was heavily banked with advancing clouds. Then a stiff breeze sprang up, and before noon the storm king was abroad in full majesty. A furious gale was tearing in past the Needles, driving straight up the Solent, and raising such a sea as is seldom seen on that protected

coast. A mile or more off shore on the Shingle Bank the breakers were surging and leaping like savage beasts hungry for prey. The thundering crash of them reached me plainly between the gusts of wind.

I went downstairs again, fearful even of the sound of my own footsteps, and I was wondering how soon Carden would bring me news, when a sharp double tap at the window caused me to hold my breath. Carden had come in stealthier fashion last night, and it was improbable that he would relax his precautions to-day. Mr. Peter Croal's tap had been more humble and insinuating. A thrill shot through me as I thought that it might be Herzog, returned with Janet and the proofs of my innocence, and therefore careless of being overheard. On the other hand, that bold summons might mean the end of all things—the arrival of the police or prison warders.

If the latter, resistance or attempted flight would be futile; so, with a desperate heart-cry that it might be the happy alternative, I wrenched aside the blind —to meet the gaze of neither Herzog nor the officers of the law.

He who demanded admission was Lord Alphington, the man whom I had been released to slay. His stately figure was drawn up to its full height, and his fine face wore a sternly-expectant expression that filled me with dismay. I knew what had happened. Lady Muriel had thrown me on her father's mercy, which, as Herzog had said, would be equivalent to throwing me to a wolf chained with red tape. By virtue of his office he would have to fall on me and rend me.

I drew up the blind, and, unfastening the window, gave him admission. Now that the die was cast, and there was to be no more hole-and-corner work, I felt a man once more. I who had been compelled to skulk would now come into the open.

"Am I to address you as Mr. Martin or Captain Rivington?" said the Premier, as he stepped over the threshold, gazing curiously round him.

"You have been told that I am Rivington, the escaped convict?"

"By my daughter, who told me a lot of other incredible things."

"If I can convince your lordship of the truth of the other incredible things by admitting Lady Muriel's first statement I shall be fortunate," said I. "Yes, I am Arthur Rivington, and I was practically released—escaped is not the word for it—to kill you."

He produced a gold snuff-box, took a pinch, and glanced out of the window. "Gad, how it blows," he said. "That steamer will be on the Shingles if she doesn't take care. Well," he added, turning his mocking gaze on me, "why don't you kill me now? You will never get a better chance?"

"I never intended to kill you, my lord," I began hotly. "If you think that——"

But he stopped me with a quick imperious gesture. "Do not trouble to plead on that count of the indictment," he laughed harshly. "Whatever your character, you have but a poor wit, Captain Rivington, or you would have known that I should not have come here alone and unarmed if I had credited that

story. What I am concerned with is your guilt in that baser crime of which you were convicted."

"I am the victim of a miscarriage of justice," I replied sullenly, "and I can assure your lordship that the plot against your life was no myth, so far as the principals in the background were concerned. Whether the man who called himself Doctor Barrables was in earnest I am not competent to judge."

"It strikes me as more like a plot on the part of that man against Sir Gideon Marske's reputation than against my life," the Premier remarked thoughtfully. "However, that is not the point at issue. I have to deal with you promptly, or I shall become legally accessory to your alleged crime—a pretty kettle of fish. Just run through the main heads of Miss Chilmark's action, so far as it is known to you, leading up to her disappearance and Mr. Roger Marske's supposed connection with the case. Be concise, please."

So once again, snatching a grain of comfort from his use of the phrase "alleged crime," I sketched the occurrences that had followed my escape, dwelling on Janet's explanation of my sister's dying words, on Roger Marske's attempt to capture or kill me in the Branksome pines, and on his departure for London at a moment's notice when he found that Janet was going up.

"Be sure, my lord, that that was the act of a guilty conscience," I urged. "He must have suspected that Miss Chilmark had been to my mother's old home and had there discovered the name of Danvers Crane, which would eventually bring her on his trail."

I labored the point advisedly, for I was aware that Marske's abrupt and inadequately explained departure had been noticed, if not resented, by Lord Alphington.

"Humph!" he muttered, taking snuff again. "All this sounds mighty like mere title-tattle. Still—" He broke off suddenly and strode to the window, where, after a minute's reflection, his attention was diverted to what he saw.

"I knew it. There'll be a wreck," he cried. "That steamer is almost in the breakers. The clumsy beggars are trying to put back to Yarmouth without proper sea-room."

I could not work up any enthusiasm about a vessel in distress just then, and I respectfully but firmly brought him back to the subject.

"My lord, I should be greatly obliged if you would ease my suspense by informing me how you propose to deal with me," I said.

He cast another glance on the struggling steamer, and then turned upon me with such impetuosity that I took it for anger. And so, in a sense, it was, though not for me. It was the irritation of the official mind brought into conflict with private influences.

"Look here," he blustered, taking snuff furiously, "there is one thing in your favor which inclines me toward you in spite of my better judgment. You saved my daughter's life, and have not once referred to it."

"I have been convicted of murder, my lord, but that is no reason why, being innocent, I should not endeavor to remain a gentleman," I replied.

It was a pompous speech, which I should have laughed at myself in happier days, but it struck home. It made his lordship swear.

"D—— you," he cried, his gray mustache bristling. "You have put me in a fine hole, sir. Now listen to me. I cannot be mixed up in shielding an escaped convict, and I shall see to it that information of your whereabouts is duly furnished to the authorities. But in consideration of your having saved Lady Muriel Crawshay's life, I shall stay my hand for twenty-four hours—on the chance that Miss Chilmark may return with news that may be of service to you."

It was a concession, and I was about to thank him for it, when my eyes, facing the window, saw what was for the moment hidden from him. The steamer had grounded on the Shingles, and the great white seas were engulfing her. An unconscious gesture on my part caused Lord Alphington to turn seaward. He caught my meaning at once, and hurried to the window, I following.

The Prime Minister on his holiday was as smaller men; he had provided himself with a pair of field-glasses, and, having unslung them, he was proceeding to focus the wreck, when round the corner of the house, into his field of vision, walked Roger Marske. My enemy's eyes glanced eagerly over Lord Alphington's shoulder at me.

"My lord, I have been inquiring everywhere," he panted. "I rejoice to have found you—to put you on your guard. You do not know who that fellow is, whom you have admitted to your table and your intimacy."

Before any reply could be made, a sharp report, heard above the strife of the elements, assailed our ears—the sound of the signal mortar at the coast-guard station, fired to call the lifeboat crew together.

With exasperating interest in the coming event, the Premier pulled out his watch. "Now I wonder how long the rascals will take to man the boat?" he reflected aloud. "What was that you were saying, Marske? The wind and sea were making such a noise I didn't quite catch it."

Heavens, how I exulted in that diplomatic fiction —sign that the great statesman meant to abide by his promise. For there was no doubt that he had heard every word of the incipient accusation, and was merely sparring for time. Marske repeated his words with redoubled venom, every syllable accented with desperate hate, Lord Alphington surely noted.

"Who is this gentleman? Why, Mr. Martin, of course, who saved Muriel's life so gallantly last week," Lord Alphington replied calmly.

"It doesn't matter what he has done or what he calls himself," Roger Marske vociferated loudly. "That man is Arthur Rivington, who was condemned at last Assizes and escaped from prison two days before execution."

Lord Alphington's ripple of silvery laughter was a revelation in the art of polite sneering. "My dear Marske, what a hallucination," he said. "Ah, perhaps that blow accounts for it. What's the matter with your head?"

With difficulty my enemy choked down an oath, and I noticed for the first time a discolored swelling

on his left temple, partly hidden by his cloth golfing cap.

"I met with a slight accident last night—in London. It has nothing to do with my statement about that man, which you will find to be correct," he replied. "Be guided by me, my lord, and go and fetch the village policeman while I stand guard over Rivington. I have a revolver."

As he spoke he produced the pistol, and well I knew what my fate would be if I were alone with him. He would shoot me like a dog and plead self-defense. But the Premier's word was as good as his bond.

"Tut-tut, put that thing up and be sensible, or, if you can't do that, go and see a doctor," he said impatiently. "Come, Mr. Martin, I am all agog to witness this excitement. Let us go down to the beach and see the lifeboat launched."

It was stepping out into the open with a vengeance, and powerful as was the protector at my side I felt that I was lost if Marske went himself for the police. But any hesitation on my part would have stultified the generous position taken up by the Premier, and for some reason—probably because he would not let me out of his sight—Marske did not take that course. He followed Lord Alphington and myself from the vacant house, and so down the chine to the shore, where we took our places among the fast-growing crowd of spectators round the lifeboat-house.

Lord Alphington, that astute mover of pawns in the game of life, kept up a semblance of intense interest in the breathless arrivals of members of the

crew. Standing, stop-watch in hand, he asked questions of bystanders and counted the brown-visaged, blue guernseyed fisherman as they passed into the shed, where the willing "helpers" were already preparing the boat for her journey.

Away across the mile and a half of angry sea the steamer was plainly visible—a hopeless wreck now, swept by succeeding avalanches of foam-capped breakers, which now and again hid her entirely from our sight.

But as yet I found it hard to sustain an interest in the endangered vessel and her crew. I felt like a spectator at a theater, brought to see a play which one is expected to applaud when one's center of attraction is among the audience.

For I could not take my eyes off Roger Marske, who during all the noisy preliminaries of the launch watched me like a wildcat crouching for his pounce on a helpless rabbit.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

TWO VOLUNTEERS

IT soon became apparent that something was wrong with the work of rescue. Men in cork jackets came to the great swing doors of the lifeboat-house, and gazed anxiously along the beach. A gentleman, whom I took to be the local secretary, fussed and fumed in and out. Above the howling of the tempest and the crash of waves on shore the murmur of voices rose.

"They're generally the two first," I heard a woman say. "They've been talking ugly lately, and I shouldn't be surprised if they don't turn up at all."

My mind jumped back to Mr. Peter Croal and his grievance, and I recognized the cause of the trouble. His opportunity for avenging the fancied slight on him had come, and with the malice of a mean nature he was sulking in his cottage when his lean, lithe arms were so sorely needed in the lifeboat. And the comrade he had mentioned was probably following suit.

In the interval of waiting for the missing members those of the bystanders who had glasses turned them on the wreck, and many were the speculations as to the

name of the vessel and the number of her crew. About a score of men could be seen clustered in the rigging, and there was but little hope for any who had remained on deck unless they were sheltering in the deck-houses, so tremendous were the volumes of water that broke over the ill-fated steamer. Like an avalanche each wave fell upon her.

"I was on the cliff just after she struck, and I thought I could make out a female figure and another rush from amidships into the wheel-house at the stern. My glasses are exceptionally good ones," remarked an old gentleman of self-important demeanor.

Roger Marske turned sharply upon him. "You must be mistaken," he snapped with a warmth that seemed quite uncalled-for. "That isn't a passenger steamer. She's too small for that."

"Nevertheless, sir, I adhere to my original statement," the pursy gentleman retorted. "I gave fifteen guineas for these glasses, and I have absolute confidence in them. But here comes a coastguardsman who will possibly corroborate me, for doubtless they were watching the steamer from the station."

I looked along the footpath that winds along the base of the cliff, and sure enough a coastguardsman was hurrying along it toward the lifeboat-house, as though on an urgent errand. But in the same line of vision, though some two hundred yards behind him, was another figure which set my heart beating fast—that of the local policeman, advancing with the leisurely tread of his species to the center of excitement. I involuntarily glanced at Roger Marske. His eye met mine, and by the malignant triumph in his

face I guessed that he too had seen the constable, and meant to take advantage of the opportunity.

But no; my temporary protector saw the danger signal, and took instant action. There was very little that escaped the alert insight of Lord Alphington.

"Look here, Marske," he said sternly, but in a lowered voice, "if you do anything to mar my enjoyment of this picturesque scene, you and I will be strangers in future; and you know what that entails."

Biting his lip and scowling at me, my enemy was equal to the occasion. "Consideration for your lordship and my devotion to Lady Muriel will prevent me from performing an obvious duty," he replied. "I shall not denounce this person so long as he is in your company."

"Mind you don't—by word or sign," said the Premier, turning away to hear what was being said by the coastguardsman, who had now arrived, and before entering the lifeboat house was being buttonholed by the magnate with the expensive field-glasses.

"Yes, sir," the honest Jack was replying. "You are perfectly right, sir, there is a woman on board. We made her out quite clearly before the vessel took the ground."

"She is a passenger steamer then?" pursued the old gentleman, delighted with his first hit, and hoping to score a second.

But he had to be content with a partial victory. "No sir, the woman is probably the captain's wife or sister; the wreck is the steamer *Nightshade*—port of London, bound for Barcelona in ballast for fruit,"

the coastguard replied, and he elbowed his way through the throng into the building, where the absence of Croal and his adherent was now causing dismay. The coxswain's voice was heard within, condemning the recalcitrant members of his crew to the most terrible tortures, and the word "volunteers" came frequently above the tumult of crashing wave and angry talk.

But what was wrong with Roger Marske? That spasmodic working of his jaw, that sudden pallor, could not be due to his having been partially scored off by the owner of the valuable glasses. My experience of the rending of human heartstrings had been extensive during the recent months, and I knew that he was face to face with a crisis that called for immediate action.

This was the way he met the crisis.

"I can't stand this," he cried, for the benefit of the bystanders at large. "If the boat is short-handed I'll go as a volunteer. I can pull a good oar." And amid cheers from the wind-riven, rain-soaked crowd he pushed his way into the lifeboat-house.

Heaven knows what instinct prompted me, but the inspiration came that if Roger Marske, the soft-living, ease-loving sybarite, wanted to be out there on the storm-swept Shingles I ought to be there too. My sluggish brain was conscious of some new awakening, though not till afterwards did I piece it all together and understand that it was the woman on board the wreck who had called me; the one woman in the world I would willingly die to save.

"My lord, I am entirely in your hands," I whis-

pered to the Premier. "Have I your permission to volunteer also?"

"Cut along," was the reply. "To me you are 'Mr. Martin' for the next four-and twenty hours—the man who saved my daughter. He does not need my permission for anything."

I was quitting his side, when he laid his hand on my arm. "A word to the wise," he replied. "I have been studying Marske for the last half-hour. I am beginning to think that there may be something in all this. He looks desperate. Take care he doesn't hit you over the head with an oar—accidentally, of course."

I thanked him with a look, and rushed away to offer my services to the harassed coxswain, who received them with a mighty growl of approval. A minute later I had donned a cork jacket and taken my place in the boat, which I was thankful to find was nowhere near my enemy. He was in the stern, and I was in the bows, so that after we had settled to the oars I could see without being seen by him. But the glance he gave me as I passed to my seat would have slain me if it could.

Too much precious time had been lost already, and when the boat had sped down the slip into the turbulent sea, the coxswain gave orders for a quick stroke that absorbed all my energy. I became infected with the mad craving to get to the steamer in time. In the wild desire to save life, and in the supreme physical effort, I forgot for a while the strange jumble of events that had sent me, a sentenced convict, out on such an errand. For the

moment I was a lifeboat-man, with no use for anyone or anything but my own thews and sinews.

At first we pulled straight for the wreck, but at some distance from the shore the coxswain gave the boat a slant to windward, with the object of getting the current to help us. About this time a roar from him told us that the forepart of the steamer, with the masts to which the crew were clinging, had gone. All that remained was the stern, with the wheel-house.

The announcement drew a groan from the brave fellows near me, but Roger Marske turned in his seat and flung at me a glance so full of malicious triumph that I could not understand it, so irrelevant did it seem to me, all unaware of his fiendish plot against my darling's life.

But enlightenment was soon to come. The coxswain had again turned the boat straight for the Shingles, and the wreck, and I guessed that he was searching for open water to take the boat through to the sheltered side, when he loosed a bellow that no storm-rage could drown.

"There's a woman at the wheel-house window and a man at the door. Put your backs to it, lads."

We did put our backs to it, with such good purpose that our cunning steersman found the opening he wanted—found, too, that it was close to the battered remnant of the wreck, showing that had she kept but a hair's breadth to one side she would have made a clear passage. Leaning all his weight on the tiller, our chief swung the lifeboat into the narrow channel in the seething maelstrom, so that she almost scraped the stones of the bank. The boat shot through the

opening under the steamer's stern, and as she did so Roger Marske dropped his oar.

A rope had trailed overboard from the steamer, and seizing it he swung himself into the air. For a moment he hung suspended in the blinding spray, and then hand over hand he swarmed up the rope into the fantastic fragment of the *Nightshade*. I, being in the bows, had already passed the dangling rope, or I should have followed, so keenly alive was I now to the *intention* of Marske in joining the lifeboat.

But I had not long to wait. With a half-admiring oath for the breach of discipline, which he attributed to over-eagerness to save life, the coxswain brought the boat round under the lee of the bank and of the wreck, and it is matter of pride to me that, excepting Roger Marske, I was the first to catch the rail and scramble on board. I had no sooner gained the deck than I was nearly swept away by a towering wave that crashed against the weather side of the stern of the steamer, and, leaping on board, flooded it with such violence that when the surge had subsided I was surprised that I had contrived to hang on—surprised also that the wheel-house was still standing.

But it was, and in the doorway was Janet—my Janet—pointing to the brink of the broken deck, whence the forepart of the steamer had been wrenched by the sea. She did not recognize me, but, distraught and terror-struck, kept pointing to the whirlpool almost beneath her feet, and screaming—"They are washed away, both of them. They fought, Herzog and Roger Marske, and the wave came and washed them away. But I have the proofs."

"Janet!" I cried, "Janet, don't you know me?"

But as I staggered toward her across the sloping, slippery deck she swooned away, and I was only just in time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER XXXIX

AFTERMATH OF STORM

FOUR hours later a council of war was assembled in the library at "Ardmore" to consider the proofs which Janet had received from Herzog, and the new light shed on my case by her experiences at the hands of Roger Marske and his father. There were present Lord Alphington, Lady Muriel, Ralph Carden, and myself. Colonel Chilmark had been notified of his daughter's rescue, but was not well enough to join us.

Lord Alphington, who had listened gravely to Janet's story, from the day of her departure down to the fatal conflict between Roger Marske and Herzog on the wreck, sat at the table, perusing the packet of letters procured at Marske's chambers. Janet, pale and exhausted by her sufferings, lay back in an easy chair with Lady Muriel hovering near, while Carden and I stood silent, waiting for the Premier's opinion.

It was given in characteristic fashion. When he had laid down the last of the letters, and made a careful examination of the instructions accompany-

ing the comfits, the great statesman rose, and coming over to me held out his hand.

"These letters exculpate you completely and entirely, Captain Rivington," he said. "I am proud to be the first to congratulate you, though we must not forget that you will be in danger till you have the King's pardon. Fortunately His Majesty is no further off than Portsmouth to-day, and I shall start at once to procure an audience. In the meanwhile you will remain here as my guest."

"But, my lord, supposing the police come while you are gone," cried Janet, starting up in alarm. "Remember, Herzog told me that the search would begin this afternoon. It is known to everyone that the 'Mr. Martin,' who lodged at 'Springthorpe,' volunteered for the lifeboat and came up here after her return."

"My dear child," said Lord Alphington soothingly, "the Prime Minister of England still has a few privileges, and among them I think that you will find immunity from police intrusion. But what of Herzog? I have heard of him as a skilful secret agent, but not in connection with all this pother."

I, too, had noticed the slip. In her excitement my dear girl had forgotten the pledge she had given to Herzog to respect his *alias*, though his death robbed her lapse of any consequences to him. Perceiving this, and that it could do him no harm, Janet faltered out her explanation—that she had promised the *soi-disant* Doctor Barrables to conceal his real name in consideration for what he had done for her.

A change came over the Premier's face as he

listened to my love's halting tones, and I began to fear that we had lost our powerful friend, so gray and stern did he grow. But his half-incoherent exclamation revealed the real meaning of his anger.

"Herzog!" he muttered, under his breath. "He was Gideon Marske's man. My Heaven, but this is too terrible." And flinging himself into his chair he bowed his head in his hands.

I saw what had happened. His quick mind had penetrated the veil, and he had made the connection between Sir Gideon Marske and the plot against himself, in which, till that moment, I do not think he had wholly believed, or, if so, only to treat it as the work of some lawless wretches insanely vengeful for some fancied wrongs.

There was a tap at the door and a footman brought in a telegram for his master. Lord Alphington, pulling himself together on the man's entrance, read it, and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank God!" he cried. "Now we can hush this greater horror up. Marske was always clever, and he has taken the best way out."

"What is it, father?" said Lady Muriel. "May I see?"

"Read it out," said Lord Alphington, rising heavily. "And then I will ask a favor of you all."

Lady Muriel's fresh young voice rang out firm and clear in the opening words, but trembled almost to a whisper as she grasped the true significance of the news. To us who knew, it was as good as a confession of guilt in the task committed to Herzog. Sir Gideon Marske was too hard a man to have taken the extreme

course because his dead son was about to be branded as a murderer.

The telegram ran:

"Regret to inform your lordship that Sir Gideon Marske, Chancellor of the Exchequer, drowned himself in the ornamental water at Marske Hall to-day on receiving telegraphic news of his son's death while aiding in rescue of lady on steamer *Nightshade.*—Marryat-Hume, Private Secretary."

It was a full minute before the Premier could speak, but when he found his voice it was to command us all to silence as to Sir Gideon Marske's initiative in the plot against him. The empire would be shaken to its furthest borders, and the clock would be put back three hundred years, if it leaked out that a political assassination had been planned by a Minister of the Crown.

"I have His Majesty's ear, Rivington," he said, turning to me. "I can rely on his tact to join us in this conspiracy of silence. To explain your escape it will be necessary to bring in Herzog's part, but so far as the public is concerned let him be called Barrables, so that the reporters can make an anarchist of him, or anything their ingenuity suggests, when they come to interview you. Roger Marske's misdeeds have no national importance, and can, and shall, have full publicity."

With which he abruptly left the room, to start on the short journey designed to secure for me an even more mighty ally than himself—the only one in the realm who had power to stay the doom that had been pronounced. Lord Alphington took Janet's hardly-

won proofs with him, but we had all seen them, and there was plenty of food for discussion in the cold-blooded guilt they revealed.

The story disclosed was a commonplace one enough in its earlier stages—that of a trusting girl secretly married to a man who soon began to tire. My sister's letters showed that after a week's honeymoon up the river they had parted on good terms and by mutual consent, she to return to her home in the New Forest, and he to resume his bachelor mode of life in London. From first to last Clara's letters breathed a spirit of true affection, without a hint of repining at the separation, but full of cheerful references to the time when they would be together "some day."

So matters went on till my mother's death, and fortunately for me it was easy to reconstruct Roger Marske's first crime from materials in one of Clara's letters. She herself had evidently been the intended victim, my mother suffering death in her place by merest accident. On the day when she received the poisoned comfits by post Clara had been unwell and had given them to her mother, who had probably put them away and eaten them a month later, such being the interval between Clara's acknowledgment of the sweets to her husband and the date of our mother's death. Thus at the time my sister did not associate the death with the present that came to her by post so long before, and my mother having suffered from chronic heart disease there was no trouble about a death certificate.

Roger Marske, delayed in his purpose, but not daunted by the miscarriage of his scheme, seemed to

have allowed six months to elapse, and then again to have sent my sister a box of comfits, one or more of which was poisoned. The last letter written by her to him contained thanks for such a package, and also the statement that she meant to enjoy them later in the day, which was the date of her death. In her last agony her mind must have awakened to the fatal import of the sweets, drawing from her the utterance which Janet, under Providence, translated rightly.

Perhaps if we had had Herzog's subtle brain to help us he would have shed light on anything that was obscure, but that many-sided victim of circumstances slept his last sleep somewhere out among the subsiding breakers on the Shingles, locked, maybe, in the embrace of the scoundrel who had guised his final desperate murderous errand as one of mercy. I could think kindly of Herzog now, after what Janet had told me on our way up from the beach, of his helpful resource on the *Nightshade*.

The storm had died down as rapidly as it had arisen, and the evening faded into night amid just such a sunset glow as I had watched from the attic window of the vacant house on the cliff twenty-four pregnant hours ago. But as we four sat together and made a pretense of dinner, and afterward wandered from room to room, there was as yet no real sense of peace. The very air was charged with tension. I was still liable to be hauled back to Winchester to be hanged, and those dear people knew it, and tried in vain to make me forget that the search for me at the instance of the Home Office must have begun hours back.

It was at about eleven o'clock, while Lady Muriel was bravely keeping up appearances by singing to us, that the climax came. The butler entered, and with a scared face announced that three gentlemen and "two other persons" were asking for the "Mr. Martin" who was staying at "Springthorpe."

"What sort are these other persons, Dawkins?" inquired Ralph Carden from the piano, where he was turning over Lady Muriel's music. "Don't be afraid, man. Speak up."

"They look like prison warders, sir," stammered the butler, aghast at such a visit. "They—they are not behaving as one would wish, when inquiring for one of his lordship's guests."

"I'll soon settle their hash," said Carden, advancing to the door, but pausing as he reached it and placing his finger to his lips.

For wheels sounded in the drive, and a moment later Lord Alphington's voice was heard at the hall door.

"Well, why are you fellows crowding me out of my own house?" he asked, in cheery accents that seemed like the dawn of a new day.

A subdued rumble from the spokesman of the party was all that reached us in the drawing-room.

"Oh, indeed," came Lord Alphington's resonant answer. "I have nothing to do with Mr. Martin's identity. But whatever it may be you need put yourselves to no further trouble about Captain Rivington. I have here His Majesty's full pardon for that gentleman, signed and sealed at Portsmouth on board the *Victoria and Albert* an hour ago. Just

step into the light and cast your eye over the document."

* * * * * * *

So passed the great shadow from my life, all the dark places that it had clouded throughout those dreadful weeks being illumined by the light of truth at last. They tell me that I look ten years older, and my sweet Janet, though she appeared as young as ever on our wedding day, says that she *feels* twenty years older than I look. But, as there is peace in our hearts and no dishonor on our name, we can afford to laugh at the ravages, real or fancied, wrought by the terrible experiences which we have, jointly and severally, here set down.

It only remains to say that the great secret of Sir Gideon Marske's dastardly plot against his noble chief never reached the man in the street, nor was the enforced resignation of two colleagues in the Cabinet ever connected in the public mind with my escape from Winchester. I have no doubt, however, that Lord Alphington's private inquiries at the prison traced the blame to the proper quarters, and revealed to him how Herzog had wielded a key sufficiently powerful to open the door of my cage.

But if Sir Gideon escaped the everlasting obloquy of having schemed for the assassination of the Prime Minister, he fully shared the infamy heaped on his son when Janet's treacherous treatment by him was made public after the investigation necessary to my final rehabilitation. Being deprived of the advantage which the trial of Roger Marske would have given me, I had that investigation rigorously pressed home,

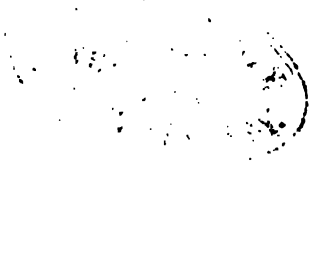
and among the minor fish caught in my net was Mrs. Webley, the newsvendor at Notting Hill.

The woman confessed that during Janet's absence from the shop Roger Marske had entered, and that it had been at his instigation, "for value received," that she had sent my brave sweetheart to the Mill House at Chipping Wyvern, which, being near his father's country seat, he must have known of as a likely spot for compassing the death of the persistent little amateur detective who was so close on his heels.

And Janet and I, when we sit over the fire on winter's evenings in the old cottage in the New Forest, where, to honest Sarah Leven's delight, there was after all no sale, come to varying conclusions about the man who played so great a part in our life-tragedy.

"Herzog was a rascal, possibly a villain, but with the elements of a good fellow in him," I will say.

And my wife will catch me up severely with the answer: "I won't hear a word against him, Arthur. He was a dear. He gave you to me."



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